Gallery 11 Nov 1879

A 11

8214

LONDON BO
PLU
Plumstead High Stree 39

MJFR
DESART, EARL OF
HONOURABLE ELLA
HURST + BLACKETT
1929
DON 26/2/87

METROPOLITAN JOINT FICTION
RESERVE

Stored at

PLUMSTEAD LIBRARY
PLUMSTEAD HIGH STREET,
SE18 1JL
TEL : 854 1728
DATE DUE

Please quote number and last date stamped
if you wish to renew by post or telephone

THE HONOURABLE ELLA.

VOL. III.

THE HONOURABLE ELLA

A TALE OF FOXSHIRE

BY

THE EARL OF DESART

AUTHOR OF

"KELVERDALE,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1879.

All rights reserved.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

8214

THE HONOURABLE ELLA

A TALE OF FOXSHIRE.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

MAMMON.

TIMES were bad in the City. Old-established firms were tottering, shaken by the fall of countless smaller concerns. It was felt that a crisis was approaching, and that at any moment the stoppage of some important house would bring ruin and disaster upon many of the proudest City magnates. Men, however

"warm," felt the effect of the universal shivers, and there was much collecting in groups and spreading of rumours, and other signs that men feared for their dearest possession next to their lives—their money-bags. Towering aloft, like the poet's tall rock that "midway braves the storm," the head of the house of Feyler and Co. reared his portly form and snapped his fingers at destiny. The Commercial Credit Association had been—thanks to the shrewdness of the junior partner, Mr. Hereward—a great success, and few were audacious enough even to hint that they could be in any way affected by the prevailing epidemic. Under these circumstances it was all the more puzzling that Hereward should seek to break his connection with the affair, and also with the firm of Feyler and Co.

"My dear boy," said Mr. Feyler, sipping

his afternoon glass of brown sherry at his office, "you are simply throwing away your bread and butter, for I don't suppose you have saved, and I call it ungrateful—d——d ungrateful of you, too!"

"You might say that if the ship was sinking, or likely to sink; but I don't see, considering that things are going so well, how it's ungrateful."

"Well, well, I suppose you're given up to fashion and the West-End now, though I don't see how you can make much coin out of them; and as to gratitude—well, look here, my boy, I don't mind saying that you have done wonders with this Association. Why, from the very first——"

"No," said Hereward, interrupting, and blowing a cloud from his inevitable cigarette into the air, "not from the very first; at least, I mean I had nothing to do with

the starting of the thing—with the prospectus, and all that."

"Nothing to do with it!"

"Except as secretary, or servant. I only did what I was told; and, if my advice was of any use, of course I was only too glad to give it."

Mr. Feyler looked somewhat suspiciously at his young friend for a moment.

"Why, you don't mean to say——"

"I mean to say nothing but this: I see the thing is all right, and I'm not wanted any more, and my time is a good deal taken up with other things. I shan't cut the City, for, as you say, it's my bread and butter, but I don't care to be tied down to one particular thing any longer. I'm like a man who ceases to be connected with any special stable and takes to promiscuous betting."

"And smashes in a year," growled Mr. Feyler.

"It all depends on the interior of his head. I flatter myself that I can keep whole."

"You're a conceited young dog, but a sharp one—I'll allow that," said the elder man, looking almost affectionately at him; "and I don't believe you would put me in the hole. About that prospectus, for instance—eh?"

"A little far-fetched, that is all. A man can't be punished for being a little far-fetched, I should say."

"Well, we are strong—strong as a rock; but times are bad, very bad; and if—if anything were to happen, that prospectus——"

"My dear sir, put that nonsense out of your head. If in the prospectus you

did draw the long bow a little——"

"I! Why you wrote it!"

"Yes, by your orders—as the secretary."

"Secretary be hanged! The whole thing was your idea."

"May be; but I am not responsible."

"Not responsible! Look here, Mr. Hereward——"

"Don't get excited, Feyler; I am only stating facts. As a matter of fact, I have no more to do with the statements made in that prospectus than the man in the moon. But that needn't alarm you so much. You are in no danger."

"I'm not so sure of that. Before, I had been content with legitimate business, and had rolled up a tidy sum too. Why the deuce I wanted to get any richer I don't know; but I did. And then you suggested this thing, and persuaded me, and now

you turn round and say you had nothing to do with it!"

"Not legally; and morally—well, morals have no room in the City. Fancy a moral stockbroker! I really don't see why you should excite yourself so much. I am leaving you simply because I want more freedom. If it were not for that I should be quite ready to stick to the Commercial Credit Association."

"You would, really?" Feyler asked the question anxiously; he was not the man he had been, and the defection of the strong young friend, on whose counsel he had leant more than he was quite aware, shook him a good deal.

"Most decidedly. Now let us go into things for the last time and see how we stand."

So Mr. Hereward severed his fortunes from those of Messrs. Feyler and Co., and

when City people heard of it they shook their heads, discarding the idleness theory, and deciding that so shrewd a man would not do such a thing without a very valid and business-like reason.

But as yet no tongues dared wag against the fair fame of Feyler and Co.—only a dim, vague suspicion had arisen; the first drops before the thunder-storm.

* * * * * *

The Lady Theodora Maryland was a great deal more than an heiress. She was the daughter of the Marquis of Virginia, the third of his title, whose ancestors, not in a very remote past, had cleared a mighty fortune on the other side of the Atlantic, and had come back to the old country to enjoy their wealth, marry into the aristocracy, and found a noble family.

But they had always had a difficulty about heirs. The first earl had been suc-

ceeded by his brother, who, being made a marquis for electioneering services, had in his turn been succeeded by another brother, who was himself succeeded by a distant cousin. This cousin, dying a little more than a year after his marriage, had only left one daughter; and, he having been the last in entail, all the possessions of the family passed to her by will, while the titles died away from the face of the earth. And the little Lady Theodora had had great trouble to grow up to her estate. Puny and misshapen, she had, by the aid of nurses and doctors innumerable, surmounted the difficulties of existence, and had come to the age of twenty-one: a firm believer in the power of wealth and in her own enviable position, and in but little besides. That man was her sworn foe she was early taught. Not a smiling partner who tried to steer her wild footsteps

through the mazy valse but to her represented a lion seeking his prey—her fortune. Every pleasure was embittered to her by this constant thought. She knew—despite the flattering efforts of the artists, and the assurance of her friends, that, if not precisely beautiful, she was very intellectual and interesting-looking—that she was simply ugly. Her nose turned up, her eyes were small, her hair was that shade of red which no one could, by the wildest poetical licence, call auburn,—or brown "shot with gold." One leg, by an accident in early childhood, was a little shorter than the other, and occasioned her to limp in her gait, and her figure was insignificant and angular.

Probably there was no one in the world of Western London more thoroughly to be pitied than the much-envied Lady Theodora Maryland, about whose wealth so

many wild tales were told, and who occasioned so many good stories as to what Bob This or Tom That had done in the proposing-and-being-refused line. One audacious Irishman, coming from Galway, for one night in London, on his way to join his regiment at the Cape, had, it was said, called in Piccadilly, and, being informed that the lady was out, had left a note, previously written at his club, to the effect that, though he had not the pleasure of her acquaintance, he felt that he should love her devotedly, and make her a model husband; and would she kindly send him a line by messenger before six o'clock, so as to obviate the inconvenience of his starting for the Cape, should her acceptance make expatriation and further soldiering unnecessary?

Then there was the other tale of the young man who arrived one day, dejected

and miserable, and, after in due form proposing for her hand, added a rider to the effect that he was desperately enamoured of another lady, but was forced to do without her for pecuniary reasons, and his mamma now insisted on his taking this more prudent step. The tale went on to say that Lady Theodora immediately handed over to him a sufficient sum to enable him to wed the love of his heart; but, considering the heiress's love of her money, this part is doubtful.

She had grown—and small blame to the poor gold-cursed woman for it—to think that it was impossible for any man to love her for herself; and in consequence of this feeling she habitually made herself so unpleasant to the other sex as to prove it pretty nearly true.

Two old aunts lived with her, and constantly warned her against the plots which

were being made against that balance at her bankers'. Truth to tell, the two old ladies were not sorry to see her remain single, for their position was comfortable enough. In the pursuance of their duty, however, they once hunted up a certain lord of large fortune and sober years, who would, they thought, make her an admirable husband. But the elderly lord was unfortunately an admirer of beauty, and, just as the arrangement seemed about to succeed, espoused a damsel accustomed to frequent a certain mysterious, and, some say, highly respectable place, lately closed by order of some squeamish magistrates, and known to its *habitués* as "The Duke's." This damsel had golden hair and a high temper, and the lord soon departed to a quieter land, where it is certain—if we can be certain of anything—that there are no yellow chignons.

Lady Theodora's heart had been fluttered once, it is true, by a beautiful Italian master, who called himself a count, and had been a third-rate actor; and, perhaps, had not the dire discovery been made that he was possessed of a wife and six children in the neighbourhood of Soho, the sober world of London might have been gratified by a beautiful and sentimental occurrence.

After this last incident the heiress settled down into a firm disbelief in manly disinterestedness, which was very trying to the many impecunious youths who thought it must be strange indeed, if they could not win the admiration of that plain, red-haired, shy-mannered, over-dressed girl. She took to books, and had gained enough information to snub these cavaliers most cruelly, in a quiet little manner that added still more to their discomfiture.

Audacious as Hereward was, he had

never dreamed of flying at such high game as this; although, after seeing her little ladyship at some ball or party, he had gone home to dream of the grand things he would do were he possessed of wealth like hers; and he was indeed a little astonished to find himself included in the party that autumn at Cauderhay Castle, to which Lady Theodora annually went, at the bidding of the old Duchess of Ross-shire. He did not deceive himself by imagining for a moment that the duchess, fond as she was of him, had any design in this.

Her grace had had some qualms of conscience as to whether the episode in Foxshire should not perforce cause her to erase Hereward's name from her list of acquaintance. She had, however—being a thorough woman—so firm a belief in the overpowering wickedness of women that she sustained no very great difficulty in

persuading herself that Hereward was only a victim, one to be pitied rather than condemned.

Two or three of the young men of the party were the eldest sons of great houses that required a little gilding, and Hereward was wise enough to keep aloof from any interference with his hostess's plans; for to become one of the list who annually attended this identical party was a thing he had long desired. It was *the* select party of the year; at the others the duchess was accustomed to mix people a little. Only the right sort went to this one, and Hereward's going created some slight astonishment in other minds than his own. But he made himself so agreeable and useful, and was so humble withal, that the slight feeling that he was an interloper—an outsider who had gained admission by mistake—soon died away,

and on the second day our hero was perfectly at his ease among what Feyler would have termed the "tip-top nobs." The slight hesitation to receive him as one of themselves had, however, done him an unsuspected benefit. A few ill-natured remarks had been made the first day in the drawing-room, when he had just arrived, and had gone out to smoke a cigarette.

"I don't see any difference between him and other people," said Lady Theodora; "and, as to his being a Jew, I didn't know that silly prejudice still survived." And, having once taken his part, Lady Theodora was naturally pre-possessed in his favour. That he never made up to her was also pleasing; and when he did talk to her his conversation was of books and intellectual subjects, while he listened with such grave deference to her opinions that she settled

in her own mind that he was evidently a very superior young man. Hereward had no particular plan in all this. To be popular with all was his determination; and to be popular with a great personage like Lady Theodora was of course desirable.

One day a singularly lucky incident occurred. Hereward, having come in from shooting, did not go to the billiard-room with the others, but went to the library to write a letter, remarking, as he entered, that Lady Theodora was reading a book in one of the bow windows. The carpet was thick and his tread light, so that she was evidently unaware of his entrance. In a little time there entered some of the young gentlemen who had been playing billiards; and they, quite unaware of Lady Theodora's presence, actually began discussing that young lady, not too favourably.

Hereward never let a chance escape him, and he was equal to himself on the present occasion.

"I can't agree with you," he remarked, in his most clear and impressive tones, when the laughter following a sally at the expense of poor Lady Theodora's peculiarities of appearance had died away. "I think Lady Theodora, without being exactly beautiful, has one of the most impressive faces I ever saw. Intellect shines in every line. I can imagine a man falling very much in love with her. There is a kind of charm about her I can't put a name to. Something so refined, so pleasant, so clever."

"I believe he's rehearsing," said one.

"No go, Hereward," said another. "You'll only add one more to the thousands slain."

But, somewhat to their wonder, Hereward insisted on being serious.

"Ah, you fellows may laugh; but I'll tell you what. If I had a million a year, and Lady Theodora had nothing, I would ask nothing better than to make her my wife—as it is, of course, such an idea never has crossed my brain."

One of the golden youths crossed the room and stared deliberately in Hereward's face.

"Quite mad!" he said, with mock gravity. "A sad case. Too much grouse-shooting and an heiress have upset his once splendid intellect. Shave his head and send him to the Ross-shire Lunatic Asylum—if there is one."

Then the conversation changed; but Hereward felt that he had scored, as indeed he had. Lady Theodora had trembled with excitement as he had spoken in her defence; his words had gone straight to the heart she scarcely knew she had.

Here was the realization of those hopes which had nearly faded away; vain fancies of her youth as she had till a few minutes ago deemed them. There was a possibility of her being loved for herself. This man—who could not have any idea that she was in the room—who was holding himself more or less up to the ridicule of his friends on her behalf—he *must* have been speaking from conviction,—as he felt. In that withered heart there was a new and unaccustomed quickening of the pulsations, and on the pale cheek came a most unusual blush.

At first these new sensations did not connect themselves directly with Hereward. His own especial feelings were not so much the thing in point as the fact that by his feelings might be gauged the possible feelings of others. Life was not quite the barren wilderness of lies she had

deemed it. When the party of young men—thirsting for more smoke—departed as they had come from the library, without passing her window, she stepped out into the room an altered woman.

She thought Hereward had gone with the others, and stopped short on seeing him.

"Lady Theodora!" he stammered, with admirably feigned dismay; "you—you have not been in the room all this while?"

"Yes"—and she smiled as she had seldom smiled before, her face growing quite soft—"yes; I was reading in the window, and didn't like to disturb you and your friends."

"You—you didn't hear what they said?"

"Every word, Mr. Hereward," she replied, with marked emphasis.

"I am—am so very sorry. Young men

say things they do not mean. I am sure they——"

"Oh, you need not apologise for them. Their opinion matters very little to me, I can assure you. I suppose I ought to have coughed or made some noise, but, you see, I wanted to hear the truth."

"And you did not hear it," began Hereward, hotly.

"Did I not? May I not think some of it was truth that I heard?"

Hereward looked the very picture of embarrassment as he stood speechless and with downcast eyes before the little great lady.

"At least, Mr. Hereward, you will allow me to thank you for standing up for me?"

"It needs no thanks, Lady Theodora," said he, finding his voice, but speaking in a low, nervous tone; "I merely said what

I thought—what I think. Had I dreamed that you were there——"

"You would have agreed with the others?"

His embarrassment gave her confidence, and it was almost in a tone of badinage that she asked the question.

"No—I could but tell the truth—only"—here he raised his eyes, met hers, and again looked down—"only I should not have presumed to—to say—some of the things I did. You will forgive me, Lady Theodora—I trust you will forgive me?"

"I scarcely know what I am to forgive, but I do so most willingly," she said, holding out her thin hand. He took it in his for a second, and let it go with a bow, and without even the slightest symptom of a squeeze.

"What do you think of my especial young man, young Granville Hereward?"

asked the duchess of Lady Theodora, soon after this episode.

"He is very clever, very agreeable, and —and—has very good taste," said she.

"Dear, dear," thought her grace to herself, as she laid her unwigged head upon her pillow that night, "I hope I haven't done wrong to ask the man here. He has plenty of audacity; and—what would the old Ladies Maryland say?"

CHAPTER II.

PORTMAN SQUARE.

LADY THEODORA, with her two maiden aunts, the Ladies Maryland, lived in a big dreary house in Portman Square, in whose gloomy hall generally waited a beggar of some kind—from the clergyman with nine children to the broken-down costermonger. Lady Theodora did her charity in a matter-of-fact, hard kind of way, that robbed the act of much of its pleasure either to her or to the recipients of her bounty. So much a year was put by for that purpose; each case was carefully investigated, and help

was given according to a scale kept in the office; but no word of sympathy or encouragement, no smile of welcome, no hope for more luck in the future, ever accompanied the donation. There was nothing about such things in the scale. Lady Theodora looked upon all mankind as more or less banded together to cheat her and such as she; and, moreover, she had that instinctive and quiet honest dislike to impecunious persons so often felt by the rich.

She would not exactly have committed herself to the assertion that it was disreputable to be poor, but she at heart thought so. Poor people were the dangerous class, whether they wore good coats and moved in the "upper circles," or whether they crawled in rags. It was one of the disagreeable duties connected with her position that she must give away in

charity, just as a king must weary himself at State ceremonials; but she would not add to the discomfort and trouble by any unnecessary kindness.

The Ladies Maryland were getting advanced in years, and had some time ago been obliged to relinquish their share in conducting their niece's business matters, so that a secretary or companion had been rendered necessary. The young person who had for four years filled this situation had, at the time we are writing of, just engaged herself to be married, or rather had agreed to marry at last the man she had waited for for years, and was going, much to Lady Theodora's wonderment and the elder ladies' disgust, to live in a lodging on one hundred and fifty pounds a year, in preference to residing in Portman Square and feeding off gold plate and receiving an ample salary. The aunts

said it was desperate ingratitude, but Lady Theodora, who was possessed of some sense of justice, did not quite go so far. She said the poor woman must be mad, and would soon pine for the comforts and luxuries she was recklessly throwing away. In the meantime it was necessary to replace her. This was easier said than done, for Lady Theodora was mightily particular, and for some time she remained secretaryless and uncomfortable. At last it struck one of the old ladies to put on her spectacles, draw forth her gold pen, and write, in a shaky Italian hand ornamented with straggling flourishes, a letter to her old friend, Mr. Manisty, Rector of Coalbridge, in Foxshire, whom she had known when he was a London curate, and rather "taken up" in consequence of his good looks and independent bearing.

The answer came at once.

"I can recommend the very person you want," he wrote; "and I will engage she would exactly suit Lady Theodora in every respect. But first I must tell you —in confidence between yourself and your sister and niece, of course—all about her. She is the daughter of a man who died last year, and who was the representative of one of the oldest families in the county. He has left her with but little money, and she is anxious no longer to be a burden on her friends. There is also another reason for her wishing to leave us. She has fallen under a cloud. God knows I believe her to be innocent—to be as pure as a woman can be. I would gladly see her my son's wife—would gladly make her my own were I twenty years younger —but I cannot conceal from you that she has fallen under a cloud, and that many persons would be justified—or think

themselves so—in refusing her admission into their houses. As I say, I know she is innocent; but some mysterious reason prevents her from attempting to clear herself. Thus the case stands. She knows I am writing this—for she will go to no one who is not told the story. It is impossible to see her without believing her to be as good and pure as the angels. Therefore, if you are inclined to hesitate, I should recommend that Lady Theodora should make an appointment for next week, when I will bring the young lady up to town. From what I have heard of Lady Theodora, I believe she is superior to the prejudices which ——"

Lady Annabel threw down the letter with a sniff. "Stuff and nonsense! Of course the thing is out of the question. Under a cloud indeed—and he wants to send her here!"

"I shall see her, Aunt Anna," said Lady Theodora, quietly, from a table where she was writing letters.

"See her! My dear Theodora, there are certain *convenances*——"

"Which trouble me not at all, as you know. I've often heard you praise this Mr. Manisty and say that his judgment was wonderfully sound."

"Yes—yes—theologically, and in all things pertaining to his office. But in the case of a woman, a young and probably a pretty woman, it is widely different. Why, you can see plainly in this letter that he is in love with her himself; and is a man—I ask you, Theodora, I ask you, Sister Elizabeth—is a man a judge of a woman he is in love with?"

Lady Elizabeth only grunted, and Lady Theodora finished the letter she was writing. Then she looked up.

"Write by to-night's post to Mr. Manisty, and appoint Thursday next, here, in the morning, for my seeing this—person."

"My dearest Theodora—I——"

"And mention that I shall be glad to see him—and her, of course—at luncheon that day."

"My dear! the bishop is coming."

"Bishops always like pretty women, and, as you say, I think this woman sounds pretty. I daresay she'll turn out a fool though, like that girl with the golden hair I saw yesterday, and I'd rather have a woman with no character at all than a fool. I'm not sure, indeed," she went on, half to herself, "if character matters so very much for people of this class. She won't corrupt *my* morals, at any rate."

And the little heiress, glancing at the

clock, bustled out of the room with that ungraceful gait of hers, to put on her things for the daily drive in the gorgeous barouche.

Ella, who came up on the Thursday, impressed her very favourably, and the only hitch in the proceedings was the utter inability she showed to take any interest in the rector's eager defence of his *protégée's* character which he entered into when they happened to be alone together.

"I daresay, Mr. Manisty," she assented, languidly; "I have no doubt it is as you say. But I really care very little about it. As long as she can understand what I want, and be useful to me, and be good-tempered, and not make mistakes, and have a reasonable amount of knowledge of the world and *savoir-faire*, that is all I want. And I am glad she is good-looking.

I like the people and things about me to be nice-looking."

"But, Lady Theodora, if Miss Bannerburn is to be in your house, and continually in your society, I really think you must care a little whether her character—"

"No, I don't"—and the heiress held up one hand deprecatingly. "No, I don't indeed. I think myself a reader of faces, you know, and a glance at Miss Bannerburn's face is enough to tell me that, whatever she may have done——"

"But she has done nothing," he interrupted, eagerly.

"She is not naturally bad," finished the other, as if he had not spoken.

The old Ladies Maryland were very frigid to the "young person," but Ella saw at a glance that they had not much power in the household, and was content with the

good impression she had made upon Lady Theodora. There had been a great deal of doubt and discussion at Coalbridge as to whether she should be a governess or a companion. She had inclined to the former, but the rector thought that she would never be able to stand its drudgery and minor annoyances.

"Are you desperately fond of children?" he asked.

"Well," she said, laughing, "I'm afraid not. It's horribly wicked, perhaps; but sometimes I have felt quite cross when they put jammy fingers on my gown, or do any of their other unpleasant tricks."

"A love of children is born with some women. It's not your fault you haven't got it. But I ask you, do you think you could bear to have no other society than that of brats, who would owe you no more allegiance than that of being set under you

to learn, and who would probably dislike you for that very reason? You've no idea how clever children are at hurting grown-up people's feelings sometimes. No, Ella. You're not a man, so you can't be exactly a private secretary; unless, indeed, we could come upon one of those great heiresses who have to employ such folk to know how rich they are."

And then—in the nick of time—came Lady Annabel's letter, and Mr. Manisty had not much trouble in persuading Ella to allow him to apply for the place.

"She is a lady—eccentric, I believe—but a lady, everyone says. There are two old women, who will be a nuisance; but there is always *some* nuisance in these things. There will be real work to do. That's where the superiority of the thing lies. You're not engaged only to go out driving with her, or to flatter her, and to

talk nothing to her. You're engaged to do actual tangible work. And not uninteresting work either, I should say. I've often thought I should like to manage the charities of a rich man."

So Ella was duly installed as companion or secretary to Lady Theodora Maryland, and took up her abode in the little room on the second floor, which had been so madly deserted by her love-sick predecessor; and sat nearly all the day in the room off the hall, which was designated "the office," into which a countless number of people were daily ushered, to explain their wants and wishes, and where a good many cheques were filled up to be signed—all together, once a day—by the heiress. It certainly was a great change from the rather purposeless pleasant sporting life in Foxshire; but at first the girl did not dis-

like it. Lady Theodora was intelligent, if unsympathetic, and was too convinced of her own greatness to give herself any airs of superiority. Except, indeed, in the matter of literary knowledge. To catch poor Ella out in a bit of ignorance or misquotation was a delight to her. She took pleasure, too, in the occasional mistakes Ella, who was not a great arithmetician, made in the accounts; and once, when a desperate orthographical fault had been committed, the heiress positively beamed with delight. And sometimes—while she sat at the writing-table in the office—the man with whom her name had been connected in Foxshire came past the door, on his way to visit Lady Theodora in the drawing-room; and little dreamed that the Miss Berners of whom that lady sometimes spoke was no other than the girl on

whose account—as he put it—he had been insulted by Lord Lorton. It was at Mr. Manisty's solicitation that she had, most unwillingly, consented to change her name.

CHAPTER III.

EVELYN IN THE CITY.

THE clerks at Mr. Feyler's house of business seldom, even when they went to the pit of a theatre, saw so beautiful a sight as Lady Hazelhatch, who had on a few occasions gone, from curiosity, to hunt her father up in his City retreat. If we had time or space to moralise, we might fill a good many sheets with sage reflections on the fact that her appearance actually ennobled and did good to these clerks. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever," the poet tells us, and with more truth than poets generally hold to. That

brilliant apparition in harmonious silks and satins, with a face the beauty of which haunted each of the fellows for weeks, did fill their souls with a sense of perfection, of something unfulfilled that yet should be fulfilled, of worthy ambition, with dim and vague but still perceptible knowledge that there is something even in life almost divine. Evelyn—sordid, plotting, false, cruel, with nothing but courage and a power of feeling fierce animal passion—Evelyn, because she was beautiful, could do this. Were it possible for Providence some day to unite perfection of soul or mind, or whatever you may like to call it, with perfection of physical beauty—well, it is impossible for the imagination (even of a traveller) to conceive a more glorious thing. But Providence, that, like a wise nurse, never gives us too much of a good thing, puts enough imperfection al-

ways either into the mind's or the body's beauty to prevent our being dazzled so as to be blind to the ordinary enjoyments of life.

After seeing Lady Hazelhatch, however, Mr. Feyler's clerks were dazzled for the time. She seemed to them a denizen of another world; but—and this is what bothered them—a world to which it was possible, or not impossible, that they might themselves attain. And Evelyn, mindful of the fable anent a mouse and a lion, never neglected to look her best, even before the least promising looker-on, and would throw out a glance on passing through the clerks' room in St. Andrew's Court, that caused young Jones to turn pale and gasp for breath, and even careful old Brown to make a mistake in his figures.

There was not one of them that would

not have died for their employer's beauteous daughter. Probably the knights of old often perspired in their heavy armour, and got killed for very worthless Queens of Beauty.

But then imagination is everything in love and romance. The young lady who would die to save her lover a moment's pang, and yet would, and does, lead her maid the life of a dog, is no rarity. The lover she sees darkly, through the glass of imagination; the maid face to face.

And marriage breaks the glass. Alas! alas!

On one of those November days when the sojourner in London feels that the joys of another world must indeed be glorious to compensate for the miseries of this, and when, according to our French neighbours, we commit suicide by dozens as a matter

of course, Evelyn came up from Braye, drove up to the entrance of St. Andrew's Court, and, dismissing her cabman—who had intended to ask for an extra shilling (whatever he received), until he saw her flashing eyes—entered the portals of Feyler and Co. The clerks positively trembled as she passed them on her way to the inner room, for the look in those glorious eyes would have subdued a hundred cabmen—the most truculent race of mankind, whatever a Prince may say.

"You are punctual, Evelyn," said Mr. Feyler, rising involuntarily as she entered. Despite himself he always, even when alone with her, treated her as Lady Hazelhatch, and not as his daughter.

She took the most comfortable chair, and motioned him to another. Then she began—

"I have scarcely any time, as I want to go back by the four o'clock train. You hold all those mortgages?"

"What mortgages?"

"What mortgages!" she exclaimed, mimicking him. "Why, what should I mean? Those on the Braye estates of course."

"Yes—all now. I don't understand why you wished it, my dear; and I can tell you it has been most inconvenient just lately, money being so tight."

"Money is always tight when you want to borrow, and easy when you want to lend."

"True enough, my dear," said Mr. Feyler, sadly.

"But I haven't come all this way to discuss that. I want you to foreclose at once."

He started. "Foreclose! Why, my dear Evelyn——"

"Yes, yes; I know. But I don't care what anyone says. That old idiot Lorton has insulted me; so has Harry. They shall find they have made a mistake!"

Her father realized for the first time that she was in a passion.

"I'll beggar that proud old fool, and I'll show my husband that without me he had better beg his bread in the streets!"

"Of course, Evelyn," began Mr. Feyler, in his grand manner, which he had hitherto forgotten; "of course I am quite aware that, compared with—with me, Lord Lorton is a beggar, and also that my foreclosing on my mortgages would really almost make him penniless; but then you must remember that his social position, to which, Evelyn, you have been raised——"

"Oh, bother the social position! What good did it do? Why, Granville has twice the position in society that we

have. Foxshire! Who supposed that I was going to be content with Foxshire? I tell you, father, that I have been insulted, and that I want—I will have—revenge."

"That's all vulgar," said Mr. Feyler.

"Maybe—we *are* vulgar, you know. But we are also powerful. Look here, will you calmly allow your daughter to be called a——"

And she mentioned a word which assuredly could not have been used by Hazelhatch or Lord Lorton.

"Why, who has dared——"

"He has, I tell you."

"Lord Lorton?"

"Yes—not in so many words, but he has implied it. I tell you that he has come spying and lying about our house until at last, yesterday, Harry dared to tell me that I was to see Granville no more."

"Granville be d——d!" said Mr. Feyler.

She rose, and he positively trembled before the fury in her eyes.

"Very well; Granville be d——d, and Octavius Feyler, the great City man, be—transported for fraud!"

"Evelyn!"

"I know all about the Commercial Credit Association. I know all about the prospectus. I know all about the position it is in. One anonymous letter would topple it down, another would set the Treasury solicitor to work. You see, papa," and here her fierce menacing tone turned to bitter irony, "we live in an age of revival of commercial morality."

The purple of Mr. Feyler's face turned to a pale blue; he gasped for breath and could not speak. So she went on—

"You see I know rather too much—

enough to send you, dear papa, to the treadmill."

"But how——"

"How do I know? What does that matter? As a man of business you must see that the point in question is that I *do* know."

"And do you think your precious Granville would escape?"

"Yes. I know he would. He had nothing to do with the issue of that prospectus. I'm afraid he would be the principal witness against the original directors."

Beads of perspiration stood on the capitalist's brow as he looked at his beautiful daughter's stern face, and listened to her calm, hard voice. Even at that moment of terror and rage he could not help admiring her.

"You—you—talk very big," he stammered.

"No, I don't. I never talk big; by which I suppose you mean threaten without justification. You know as well as I do that if this company were to fail—and it is taking all you have to prop it up just now—you would stand in great danger of being prosecuted for fraud. I happen to know all the particulars, and I tell you that, unless you do what I wish, I will cause the company to fail."

"And what is it you wish of me?"

"That you should foreclose your mortgages on the Braye estate."

"And do away with all the advantages I was to gain from the relationship. Evelyn dear, you are mad. Even if they do wish you to drop Granville, I don't see——"

"But I tell you that life without Granville is to me not life at all. I tell you that nothing shall induce me to give him up. Of course you don't know what 'love' means, and I thought I didn't; but, at any rate, he is everything to me. Let the old fool choose between beggary and leaving me alone. I don't want you to do anything at once. I only want you to threaten, and to go on if and when I tell you. What price did you lend him the money at?"

"Four," groaned the bewildered parent.

"Yes, that makes it safe. He can't possibly get it to pay you."

"I've scarcely any security for the last £15,000," said Mr. Feyler.

"All the better. We have them in our hand. I'll show his lordship that, though he may horsewhip some people, he shall suffer for insulting me."

Mr. Feyler had not an idea to what she alluded, and was only too glad when she, having gained her point, swept out of the office.

CHAPTER IV.

A BARGAIN.

THE explanation of Evelyn's visit to the City is simple. The friendship, or *liaison,* as ill-natured gossips preferred to call it, between her and Granville Hereward became at last so open that it could not but come to Hazelhatch's ears. And it did so in many ways. Lord Lorton spoke. Lady Lorton hinted. Even Miss Newsbury hinted. And, his suspicions once aroused, he had little difficulty in understanding the queer looks of those he met: which looks had been incomprehensible to him before. Not that he believed

that there was anything serious in the matter. But it certainly did seem to him that this boy-and-girl friendship should give way to his will; and that, though it might cost her a pang, she should vindicate her good name and his honour even at the expense of losing her friend.

Once on the alert, it was impossible any longer to misunderstand the frequent visits to Braye Lodge of Hereward, generally timed so as to occur when he himself was absent on county business; or to avoid seeing the familiarity between the couple which even their old acquaintanceship could not justify. Hazelhatch admired and trusted his wife so much that it was a pang to him to be obliged to own, even to himself, that she was thoughtless and wilful. Of anything worse than this he did not for a moment accuse or suspect her. Careless, indeed, and wilful beyond belief,

she was just at this time; for it had become evident to her of late that her power over Hereward was waxing feeble—that her smile was no longer all in all to him—that her frowns no longer vexed his inmost soul. She had heard rumours about Lady Theodora in London, and the idea that he—the only man she cared for—should transfer his allegiance was maddening to her wayward, passionate spirit. Of course that it was for money made it a shade less bad; but, even so, at all hazards, it must be stopped; and there was but one way. She must bring him to her feet again. She must show him how it was possible for her to love; how glorious beyond all gold her love might be. And then—once he *was* again at her feet—well, then she would consider the next step. Hazelhatch had been so credulous and unsuspecting hitherto that his interference angered her much

more than the interference of a suspicious husband would have done. She had got to believe that a soft word or a caress was always sufficient to quiet him, and lo! at last the soft word, the caress, any number of caresses, was not sufficient. He stuck to his point as a weak man will when he is determined to be firm.

"Of course, Evelyn, I don't believe any of these tales, but I must insist—insist—that there be no longer any cause for them. For your own sake, for mine, you must break with this man. After that episode of poor Ella you cannot really care so much for him. All I can say, and I say it most deliberately, is that, if you still refuse to deny yourself to the man, I will give orders that he shall not be admitted."

"You will give orders—to the servants?"

"Yes," said he, biting his lip.

"A fine position—both for you and for me! You will take the servants into your confidence?" she asked, with a sneer.

"It is very humiliating—very terrible. But if you force it upon me——"

"Force it upon you! Because your idiots of neighbours, because your prying old father——"

"Stop, Evelyn!" cried he, with something of command in his voice. "Stop! I will have nothing said against my father."

"But anything any malevolent fool chooses he may say against your wife!"

"It is not only what I have heard—it is what I have seen."

"And what have you seen, pray?"

He hesitated.

"I have seen that you are more familiar with Mr. Hereward than my wife ought to be with any man."

"Your wife!" she began, with rising

fury; and then, controlling herself, she said—

"So you wish your wife to give up all her old friends because some ill-natured fool chooses to talk scandal?"

"It is not a question of giving up 'all your friends,' my dear. Mr. Hereward you surely can meet as you meet any other acquaintance. I tell you, once for all, that I will not have him in and out of my house as he has been."

"You will not! *Your* house! And what if I refuse to be guided by you in this matter?"

"I trust you will not, Evelyn. I hope you will not refuse. If you do—I shall act as I told you."

"Take the servants—which means the county—into your confidence?"

"The county, I fear, is talking enough already."

She paused for a few moments, in thought. At last she spoke, calmly, though her cheek was flushed and her lips trembling with suppressed passion.

"I will give you no answer now. I shall go to London to-morrow and see my father."

"But surely your father——"

"Permit me to have as high an opinion of my father's judgment as you have of yours. Till I return I see no use in your talking any more on this subject."

Hazelhatch acquiesced; and next day she went to London, and, as we have seen, did speak to her father. For a few days after her return to Braye they did not go back to the subject, and Hereward did not call at the house. Then Hazelhatch walked over one morning to the House, and found Lady Lorton in floods of tears.

"Oh, we're ruined, my dear boy—quite

ruined! He's a wicked man: when one thinks of what he gained by it all, and now he turns on us!"

"Who?" asked her son, bewildered, and somewhat embarrassed by the weight of his mother as she leant upon him in her distress.

"Why, Mr. Feyler. Oh, Harry, your father is in such a state of mind. I was quite alarmed when I saw him look at his razors this morning, after he got the letter; and his language was so shocking, when I was having my hair done, that Louise declares, though she don't understand a word of English, it made her nerves tingle."

"But what is it all about?"

"Oh, a disclosure, or a something. Those horrid mortgages, you know, which your father would insist on giving Mr. Feyler—why, I never could understand.

They've turned up again, it appears. How such a vulgar man as that can presume to think——"

"Do you mean that Mr. Feyler is asking to be paid the money he lent my father?" asked Hazelhatch, in some amazement.

"Something of that kind. *Can* you believe it?"

"Where is he?"

"Heaven knows. Oh, Harry, *do* persuade him to do nothing rash. He went out—there's the lake, you know!" And the old lady, struck with a new fear, looked in terror out of a window from which the lake—about four feet deep at its deepest part—was not visible.

"Is he so very much knocked over, mother?"

"Knocked over! You should have seen him. Scarcely touched his breakfast, and tried to light his cigar before he had cut

the end off. He said they might as well expect him to pay off the National Debt."

Hazelhatch did his best to calm his mother's fears, and went in search of his father, whom he found in the stable, anxiously examining the swollen limb of a horse, and engaged in a sharp controversy with the stud-groom as to the relative merits of hot and cold water.

"I tell you I wouldn't use hot water myself!" he exclaimed, as his son entered the box.

"Hallo, Harry! Just come in the nick of time. Would you, or would you not, use hot water to a leg like that?" And he pointed to the poor animal's fore-leg, which stood in a pail of hot water.

"'Osses is 'osses," said the groom, sententiously, and with some pride in his power of expression; "and 'uman bein's is 'uman bein's. Cold water for your lord-

ship's legs, if you like; but 'ot for 'osses."

"But, my good man, it stands to reason——"

"Come out, father," interrupted Hazelhatch, impatiently; "I want to speak to you."

"*Not* on business, my boy?" asked his lordship, anxiously, feeling his horse's leg; "not on business? I've had enough of that to last me a long time this morning."

"And is it settled, then?"

"Settled? No. But I've thought it over—thought it over enough for one day—and done with it."

"But I thought it was so serious?" They had left the groom victor of the field, and emerged into the stable-yard now.

"Serious! I should think it was. All the more reason for putting it aside when well thought over."

"Mr. Feyler wants his money, does he?"

"Now there you go! Just after I told you I had done with the subject you revive it. Yes; the old —— your father-in-law wants his money."

"On the mortgages?"

"Yes; threatens to foreclose at once."

"May I see the letter?"

"Of course you may. It's pleasant reading. From his solicitors, you know. By Gad, where did I put it? Why, I must have lit my cigar with it—how stupid! However, I perfectly remember it—and all it says is that Mr. Feyler requests payment, according to the terms of the mortgage, within six months of the notice; and they give notice."

"Nothing more?"

"No; except that, at the end, they say that their instructions are peremptory. But lawyers always say that. I've gener-

ally had to do with peremptory lawyers."

"It's very serious."

"Serious! My dear boy, it's simple ruin. I can no more pay Feyler's mortgages off than I can fly. Simple ruin. 'Pon my word, now I come to think of it, it's—it's——"

But he failed to find a word strong enough to express his feelings.

"And what do you mean to do?"

"Do? Why, tell Feyler—don't be offended, Harry, although he is your father-in-law—to go to the devil."

"Really," said Hazelhatch, impatiently, "if you can't be serious, father——"

"Serious! The idea of not being serious in a crisis like this! Why, my dear boy, Brussels or Boulogne looms in the future—looms devilish near, I should say. Your mother, of course, will sell her jewels; and some of those horses ought to fetch a

fair price. I wish I could sell Green; as the most obstinate groom in England he ought to command a top price. Just imagine, that idiot took that bay mare——"

"Oh, hang the bay mare, father!"

"Hang the bay mare! Well, Harry, I call that devilish ungrateful, considering I've always intended her for you next season, and I must say that I never saw an animal improve as she has improved since last year, notwithstanding all Green's obstinacy about her."

"But I want to talk about these mortgages. *Could* they not be paid off?"

"Could the crew of the 'Phantom Ship' be paid off? My dear Harry, you sometimes talk like a child. By the way, it's Graines' day in the office. Come in, and we will look into matters. It's a horrid

nuisance, but I haven't anything of importance to do to-day."

"Anything of importance!" groaned Hazelhatch, following the jaunty step of his father into the office.

The result might have been anticipated. Mr. Feyler's mortgages covered all, and more than all, the value of the estate, and his foreclosure simply meant its forced sale, with the exception of the house, and park, and home-farm, which were entailed.

"It's a very jolly state of affairs," said Lord Lorton, as they came out of the office, and he lit a fresh cigar.

"But I cannot think Mr. Feyler means it," said his son.

"Egad, that letter looked like business. But anyhow, I'll go up to town to-morrow and see. There's nothing like taking the bull by the horns." And, so saying, the man hovering on the verge of ruin went

and planned a new hot-house, which was to be dirt cheap at six hundred pounds.

Of course Hazelhatch spoke of this affair to his wife that night. He had intended not to do so; but it had never been his custom to keep anything from her, and habit prevailed.

"I fear my father is in earnest," she said. "I saw him the other day, as you know, and he mentioned this. He declares that he has been deceived, and has lent more than the property can pay. In fact, he seems determined to sell. It will be unpleasant for your father and mother. It is lucky Violet is married." She spoke in the measured, cold manner she had adopted since their conversation about Hereward.

"You talk, Evelyn, as if my father's ruin were nothing."

"Of course it is disagreeable for you,

and, to a certain extent, for me. I shall dislike seeing my father-in-law's name in the *Gazette*."

"In the *Gazette?*"

"Of course. My father said he should at once make him a bankrupt."

"Evelyn!"

"Why not? It's what is done to everyone in these cases, I believe. People shouldn't borrow more than they can repay."

"You speak as if you had no sort of feeling for my father or for me."

"We will put you out of sight, please. As for your father, I scarcely see why I should care so very much for him. He it is who has slandered me."

"I am sure, Evelyn——"

"Why, you know, Harry,"—he started, for she had not called him by his name since their quarrel—"if it had not been

for him you would never have suspected me. I *cannot* care much what happens to him, if it doesn't make you very unhappy."

"But it does. It really hurts me more than it hurts him."

"How? There is money enough settled on us; we can always be comfortable."

"Not hurt me to see my father gibbeted as a bankrupt, to see all the place broken up, the property taken away—not hurt me! Evelyn, you don't understand these things."

"No, I suppose not; you see, I am not a member of the landed aristocracy—by birth. I suppose, by the by, when one of them loses his landedness he doesn't lose the aristocracy part of the thing too?"

"I scarcely think a joke on such a subject to me is in good taste."

"No, it wouldn't be if the thing were really as serious as you think it."

"Is it not?" he asked, looking at her arch smile.

"Don't you think I have *some* influence with this dreadful creditor?"

"And could stop this? Oh, Evelyn, you do not know how grateful I should be! My father takes it in his usual jaunty way, but when the actual thing came I really believe it would kill him. He is tremendously fond of the old place and of the county, and to be paraded as a bankrupt and turned out—yes, I really believe he would not be able to bear it."

"I think I could answer for my father stopping any further action in the matter if——"

"If what?"

"If I asked him as a very great favour. No one else could move him, I know that."

"Then you will ask him?"

"I don't know. Look here, Harry: you

were very unjust and insulting to me the other day. Lord Lorton was the cause of your injustice and your insult. Now you ask me to exert myself to save Lord Lorton from the consequences of his own extravagance and my father's generosity—for it was generosity to lend so much on such bad security. Well, I will, on this condition: repudiate Lord Lorton's insulting opinion of me, and I will save him from ruin; in other words, own you were wrong in what you said to me—apologise for your vile and unworthy suspicions—and I will undertake that these foreclosures shall never take place."

The two stood facing each other, and he thought he had never seen her look so superbly handsome.

"You mean about Hereward?"

"I do."

"You want to see him?"

She put her hand on his arm, and he trembled, for still her touch had a magical power over him.

"Harry, put away those dreadful thoughts of me. Cannot you trust me? I do wish not to be obliged to give up a friendship very dear to me. But it is a friendship, nothing more. Look me in the face, and say you think it is more? You know you do not in your heart. What you said to me the other day was an insult. Were I tamely to submit to it I should almost be acquiescing in the justice of the accusation. Suppose that from now my door is closed in Granville Hereward's face, what will people say? Why, they will say that I have been found out! Yes, they will say that, and with much show of justice. They will not be able to believe that you, my husband, suspected me without cause, nor will they believe that I,

innocent, would give up my friend because of idle talk; and not only that, but do a thing which must inevitably make everyone think me the reverse of innocent. To suspect a woman is almost to make her a worthy object of suspicion. Have you not pride enough to brush away all these slanders? or do you set the idle gossip of your acquaintances above the purity and truth of the woman you profess to love—of the woman who bears your name? Yes, Harry, it may be a whim, but it is one to which I will adhere. Remove from me the stigma of your suspicions, and I will remove from you the danger of seeing your father a bankrupt and a beggar."

She was quite surprised at her own eloquence. Nothing but the terror of losing Hereward could have so inspired her. Hazelhatch was much struck by her argument.

"But if I cannot," he said, "you will promise——"

"I will promise nothing," she answered, with the proud air that became her so well. "When you engage a butler you do not make him promise not to steal the wine. You must either trust me all in all or not at all."

"I will trust you, darling," cried he, holding out his arms, "and without this kind of bargain. I know you will try to save my father."

"I will," she said, after his passionate embrace had ceased. "I will write at once to him, and tell him that if he ever wishes to see me again he must abandon this way of raising money."

And so the contention ceased, and Evelyn next day sat down and wrote a line to Mr. Feyler, telling him to do no more in

the matter of foreclosing the Braye mortgages.

She did not know that Lord Lorton—sticking to his determination to take the bull by the horns, and a little influenced by a not unnatural wish to escape for a brief interval from the lamentation and tears of her ladyship—had departed by the morning train; and she little dreamed what would be the result of the scheme she had so ingeniously devised. It is perhaps worth recording that Lord Lorton, the man who was going on the almost hopeless errand of averting utter ruin, left word with his steward before he left to attend a great shorthorn sale hard by, and bid largely for those expensive animals.

CHAPTER V.

AN ACCIDENTAL REVENGE.

ONE of the oddest things—intellectually—in this life is the fact that consistent stupidity often triumphs over ill-regulated cunning. The stupidity like an ill-shapen, useless rock, stands steady, and the waves of cleverness beat and beat over it, round it, into every crevice, looking so graceful in their gyrations, sending such brilliant spray up into the sunshine—but producing no effect whatever. At last the storm subsides, the rock is just the same—ugly and unæsthetic—but just the same; and the water, no longer curving itself into

a myriad forms, lies under it, despondent, quiescent, humble, even reflecting its victorious enemy's image on its smooth surface.

Nothing could have been better managed than the little arrangement by which Mr. Feyler's threats were to put a pressure on Hazelhatch through his father, and thus enable Evelyn to see Hereward as often as ever. But she just overshot the mark. Lord Lorton—careless and unbusinesslike as he was—was not a man to sit down quietly under a threat. The idea of a pitched battle with Mr. Feyler rather amused him, too; and, whatever good might come of his visit to the capitalist, anything was better than listening to the "I told you so"'s of his wife.

Lady Lorton, to do her justice, really did think she had "told him so." Like a good many people, she had a strong sense

of after-event prophecy, so to speak, and was endowed with a marvellous talent of predicting what had already occurred. Because she had seen Mr. Feyler's vulgarity in the early days of the heiress-plot, she firmly believed that she had set her face against the marriage; and, much as she believed in the cleverness of her husband, she could never resist the pleasure of being loudly miserable about his mistakes.

So Lord Lorton took train and went to London. He started early, having telegraphed to make an appointment with his dire mortgagee, and drove to Feyler House, in Kensington, straight from the station, sending his servant with the luggage to the lodgings opposite his Club, which he preferred to the discomfort of the Grosvenor Square house with the carpets up. He had, with an easy carelessness that was almost tact, managed to make Mr. Feyler

thoroughly understand that there was no possibility of intimacy between them, and therefore his visits to Feyler House had been very few, as had been the other's visits to Braye or Grosvenor Square. So Mr. Feyler was a little surprised when he received the telegram telling him that the man he was accustomed, in his own circle, always to refer to as "my son-in-law's father—Lorton," was coming to see him. That he should come about the mortgages seemed unlikely; it was such an unbusiness-like proceeding. In the office in the City Mr. Feyler could have stood his ground on such a point very easily; but here in his own house, where he prided himself on dispensing a so magnificent hospitality, surrounded by his gems of modern art, and perhaps by gentlemen from the East who could scarcely be called gems—although no doubt they owed much

to their own art—it would be very difficult for him to be firm with the Earl of Lorton. Yet Evelyn had most distinctly said he must be firm; and she knew too much—a great deal too much. Strange that, even as the man ground his teeth to think that his own daughter had threatened him with the treadmill, he felt a thrill of satisfaction at the thought that he was the progenitor of so clever a woman. To be in her power was almost pleasant to him; and he was most decidedly in her power, or, indeed, in the power of anyone who knew much about the Commercial Credit Association. Oh, that prospectus! Feyler had gone through his monetary career with as little honesty as possible, but he had hitherto always steered clear of anything legally fraudulent. But that prospectus! He knew it by heart; he repeated it to himself as others repeat the Lord's Prayer, before he slept;

he woke with its splendid, lying sentences on his lips; they pursued him through breakfast; they accompanied him to the City behind his stepping phaeton horses; they got between him and the chop and glass of old sherry he indulged in at the office; they almost spoiled the adulation he received from the City men who dropped in to see him, and the subserviency of his dependents; they came back westward with him; they sat behind him on his hack in Rotten Row; they nearly choked him as he surveyed his gold plate from the end of his dinner-table, and took wine with many men and women of much wealth but few *h's*. And to think that all this could be done by this poor little prospectus! True, it was false, and it might be proved that he knew it to be false. But were not such things done every day? Was not this the nineteenth century fashion of growing rich

at a bound? He had been rich before, it is true; but was a British merchant to be contented? He had but done what they were all doing around him, only he had done it on a larger scale, as befitted Feyler and Co. And was he to be haunted by the dock and the treadmill? Pooh! And as he drank his last glass of champagne, and smiled assent to some new compliment to his position from a toady, he felt bold for a moment; but only for a moment. Back came the terrors of exposure and disgrace; back came the long, dark night, with its sleeplessness and its property of making a man think.

Things—apart from this Association—had not been going well with Feyler and Co. lately. One partner had retired from the firm, and finding him his money, at this tight time, was no easy matter; then

one or two houses connected with them had gone under, and herculean efforts had to be made to avert all suspicion of their smash having had any effect on the house in St. Andrew's Court. Hereward's defection, too, had been a great blow to our financier, who had become accustomed to rely greatly on his shrewdness and sagacity. So the man to whom Lord Lorton, looking delightfully fresh and smart, was shown in, was not in his happiest state of mind.

"How are you, Mr. Feyler?" said his lordship, shaking his hand. "Bachelor quarters these of yours, I suppose. No objection to tobacco?"

"Certainly not, my lord. Let me offer you a cigar."

"Thanks, no," said the other, pulling out an enormous cigar-case; "I've got

accustomed to my own. No doubt yours are better. Well, I've come to talk about business."

"Oh, my lord! I hoped your visit——"

"Was for pleasure? Well, not exactly. You see, when a creditor writes that he won't wait, you don't go to see him to talk about the weather."

"I am sure—really, Lorton——"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Feyler," put in Lord Lorton, laying emphasis on the *Mister*.

"Really I was very sorry to write as I did, but times are very bad, and your security is—you see I look at these business things as a business man—very bad too. I trust that nothing I may be obliged to do will disturb the pleasant relations between us."

"Well—you see," said Lord Lorton, meditatively, blowing the smoke through

his nose, "much as I might esteem you, as a man of business, for ruining me on principle, I could scarcely, as a man of pleasure, enjoy your society when I was out at elbows in consequence."

"I am sure, Lord Lorton," began Mr. Feyler; but the other interrupted him a little impatiently.

"I told you I had come on business. You want your money on those infernal mortgages?"

"Well, as you put it so bluntly—yes."

"And you are perfectly aware, of course, that I haven't got it, and can't get it?"

"I don't know—there may be ways——"

"Oh! I'm not going to the Jews. I've had enough of them. Do you know I once paid 160 per cent., and thought I was paying 40; but then I forgot about the number of quarters there were in the year, and totally ignored the beautiful

working of compound interest. It was a very pretty do, that," he continued, reflectively; "and its ending was so quaint. I kicked the fellow downstairs, I remember, and then paid him, on condition he didn't prosecute for assault, for I broke his arm, or his leg, or his head, I forget which; I know it wasn't his neck. By Gad! I can see him rolling down the stairs now!" And his lordship, quite oblivious of his companion, burst out laughing.

Mr. Feyler thought this a good opportunity of asserting his position.

"There are great differences, my lord," he said, standing before the fire, and protruding much in front, "between such persons as you speak of and commercial men like myself. In fact, we have no position in common. I lent your lordship money at a low rate of interest, with

scarcely any security, because you were my relation—by marriage." He added the last words as he saw a grave look come over the other's face. "Because you were my relation—by marriage—I made what is, to a commercial man, and at such a time as this, a great sacrifice. When my money might have been bringing me in 10 or 15 per cent., I allowed it to go to you for 4. But things have occurred that make it absolutely necessary for me to have money at once. You, my lord, who are not behind the scenes, little know the shifts to which we commercial men, even though we may be at the top of the tree, are put for money sometimes. Commercial fortunes are swayed by every wind that blows. Let the man who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls; let——"

And, overcome either by the remembrance of the prospectus, or by the old

sherry, or the misquotation of Scripture, or his own eloquence generally, Mr. Feyler absolutely broke down with a tear in his eye. Lord Lorton was touched.

"My dear fellow, I really am sorry. My bankers let me overdraw a little. If fifty pounds——"

Mr. Feyler recovered himself instantly. The idea of the pauper offering him—him!—the head of Feyler and Co.—fifty pounds!

"No, my lord; you mistake me. I was speaking of hundreds of thousands, and more of others than myself. It is true that I am obliged to call in a good deal of money, and among other securities these mortgages of yours."

"Egad, I'd forgotten all about them," said Lord Lorton, starting. "And that's what I came about. You really mean business, then?"

"I fear I must."

"And you can't wait?"

"Well, you see, my lord," said Mr. Feyler, wishing his daughter had not put this difficult task upon him, "what between one thing and another——"

"What sort of things?"

"Oh, many! The Commercial Credit Association, for instance—that is——"

"Is that shaky? Well, I always thought that was too good a sounding thing to last."

In vain Mr. Feyler tried to protest. Lord Lorton went on:

"Well, I'm devilish sorry for it—devilish sorry. All I can do is to go back and see Graines, and tell him he *must* find the money. That has often succeeded. But somehow I don't think it will this time. Really, Mr. Feyler, I am devilish sorry to hear this, and I only wish it were in my

power to do more for you. But I'll pay if I can, and if I can't, well, you must get as much as possible. I daresay Hazelhatch might try to do something; and, as for me, I'm easily satisfied. I haven't the smallest doubt I could live on very little." And, so saying, his lordship lit an enormous cigar, unheeding the apologies and protests of his host, and departed in the hansom he had, according to custom, kept waiting, although there was a cab-stand opposite the house. Passing by a water-colour exhibition on his way back to his club, the whim seized him to alight, and in half an hour he emerged the fortunate purchaser of two gems of water-colour art, dirt cheap at 120 guineas.

* * * * * *

Lord Lorton's club—at least, the one he specially affected—was one several degrees too young for him: that is, judging by the

standard of other men. But one of his peculiarities was his dislike to mix with those of his own standing.

"Why, my dear fellow," he would say, "it's like perpetually looking in a looking-glass and seeing my own wrinkles reflected in other men's faces. When I meet old Evergreen, and am inclined to laugh at his air of youth, I suddenly remember that I went to Eton the year before he did. When I deplore the great change in Gouteby, and remark how aged he is, it suddenly flashes across me that he is five years younger than I am. Going to the club where the Evergreens and Goutebys go is like having 'We must die' perpetually sounded in one's ears, as those monks do. No, I like to mix with the young, the men of action. They may think me a fogey, but I believe I imbibe some of their youth; and I know I prefer to be laughed

at rather than sit, surrounded by old fellows wheezing and snorting, contemplating my own decadence."

And wherever he went he was popular. The jokes of young men were not too young for him to understand, and his *répertoire* of tales was so old that it was new to his hearers. Not that he was by any means one of those atrocities, a buffoon who makes use of his grey hairs to make his buffooneries go down. Lord Lorton was always and everywhere a gentleman. More, he was a scholar, and although that stood him in little stead in this unclassical day, still it filled the gilded youth with a vague sense of awe as they pondered that he could, and he would, have told them that story of Fanny Elsler, or that exquisite *historiette* of Vestris' early days, in Latin, or even in Greek! There

was a story current, and probably true, about him which is perhaps worth repeating here. Young Lord Verrivell, inspired by champagne, had come into the club smoking-room one evening, and, hearing that Lord Lorton was in another room, sent a message couched in these words, "Bring old Lorty here; he is amusing." The messenger was pedantically faithful to his text. Lord Lorton came, walked up to the young man, who, surrounded by others like himself, was smoking an enormous cigar, and simply said, "Take young Verry away; he is a bore." And, delighted with a repartee that they could understand, they did bear "young Verry" away, until he apologized, and was permitted to return.

Of course Lord Lorton found no difficulty in suiting himself with dinner companions

at the Club, and, as it happened, the men near whom he sat were all of that new class which has lately sprung up in London; the mixture of man of fashion with man of business—half Belgrave Square, half Stock Exchange—one pocket full of invitations to balls, the other stuffed with coupons and bills at three months; swells in the City; City men in the West End; laughed at in Capel Court because of their fine-gentlemanism, and in Hyde Park because of their money-grubbing; the mules of social life, of no particular breed, but useful; not quite so good-looking as horses, and not quite so ugly as asses. Dining with Alderman Grundy, they talk of the Duchess of Pantulicon's last little party. Dining with Her Grace, they awe her by their intimate knowledge of the remote future of the Candahar-Cabul Tramway Company (Limited). A grand invention

of our "idle day," but liable to wear out. And there are some so dense as not to regret this want of stability!

But to return. With such as these did Lord Lorton find his lines cast when he came to dinner at his Club, and to such as these did he discourse pleasantly about most subjects under heaven—hunting, racing, shooting, the theatres, the music-halls; the woman who lifted the entire orchestra (playing "God Save the Queen") with her teeth; the last quarrel over cards at the —— Club; the most probable move of the Home Rulers; the turpitude of the Radicals. And then they got round to money matters generally, and his lordship, having taken a fancy to the "dry monopole," was rather communicative as to his own affairs.

"Money," said one, "is the easiest possible thing in the world to get, if you

know the way. All you have to do is to call a hansom and drive to the City."

"Gad!" said Lord Lorton, "I've driven to the City often enough, and never found anything there except dirt and St. Paul's. I always find the Jews at the West End handier and more easily understood."

Then the City conversation began, and he listened vainly for some glimpse of explanation as to how gold was picked up there. At last the Commercial Credit Association was mentioned. Lord Lorton was fond of talking, and for some ten minutes he had been unable—not knowing much of the subject—to enjoy himself. So he broke in at once—

"Ah! the Commercial Credit Association. That's in a bad way."

"Bad way!" exclaimed two or three, horrified. "Why, it's Feyler and Co.!"

"Son married the daughter," whispered

a discreet gentleman; "sure to know."

"It may be Feyler and Co.," said Lord Lorton, filling his glass, "but it's in a bad way. I had it from Mr. Feyler himself."

He spoke in all innocence. He had no idea that the character of a thing of this kind is as delicate as the character of a woman or a horse. Lord Lorton had secrets about horses' legs locked up in his bosom, which all the tortures of the Inquisition would not have forced him to reveal. But he knew nothing of companies.

"No," he went on; "I was quite sorry to hear about it. Poor old Mr. Feyler seemed quite distressed. I suppose it *is* a nuisance having a thing you started fail. I offered to do anything I could; but he talked of its being an affair of hundreds of thousands. However, I suppose such sums are nothing to you people. Tell me, are you bulls or bears?"

It never struck the easy-going old gentleman that he had done any harm, and he went to his night Club and talked about hunting until an early hour of the next morning, with the most serene unconsciousness of having given the final kick to the toppling edifice of Feyler and Co. It of course never occurred to him that one of his hearers was the City article writer of a weekly paper that went in for strict morality—except, of course, when any investments of its proprietor and editor were concerned; and, returning to Braye, he never saw the copy of *Glory* (the last new "Society" journal) which contained the famous article turning the Commercial Credit Company inside out, and denouncing "that infamous swindler, Octavius Arthur Feyler," to the vengeance of the law.

Mr. Deherty, the editor and proprietor

of *Glory*, had been once bested by Mr. Feyler, and took his revenge as befitted the cleanser—except when it concerned himself—of the Augean stable.

Mr. Feyler took in *Glory*. It was full of libels that were very amusing, the actions brought by the libelled men serving for advertisements. His confidential servant read the article on his master, warmed the paper, and put it on the breakfast-table. Mr. Feyler, having received the letter in which his daughter told him to hold his hands with regard to the Braye mortgages, entered the room, and proceeded to dip into the scandal part of it. Having seen several spicy, if mysterious, paragraphs, he glanced at the City articles, when his eye was caught by his own name in large letters, and without the prefix of "Mr." The servants thought the bell would never ring for them to clear away,

and at length a tall footman was sent up to reconnoitre. He found his master lying on the floor, *Glory* in his grasp, breathing stertorously.

A fit, the doctor said—not certainly alarming; but his relations had better be sent for.

CHAPTER VI.

"NEVER! NEVER!"

IN the meantime things were going from bad to worse at Braye Lodge. The wall of mistrust that separated husband and wife was daily growing broader; and poor Hazelhatch, desperately adhering to the belief that she must love him, although appearances were so against the fact, was about as happy as a drowning man clinging to a water-lily. And the worst of it was that the colder she became, the less often she showed those fits of affection for him which perhaps had been the outcome of an occasional feeling of pity, the more hope-

lessly and devotedly he loved her. Her image—and it must be admitted that it was very beautiful—filled every nook and cranny of his existence—mocking him, scowling at him, defying him, deceiving him, but always filling him with an ecstasy that was far more pain than joy. If she had known how very little acting on her part would make him happy, how even the most careless of caresses sent him into a seventh heaven of delight, they might, perhaps, have lived on happily enough. But she could not understand his feelings. Unselfish love was a sealed book to her. What part of his heart she did read, she despised—as women often do despise what they should be proud of.

And then began that bickering over trifles which eats away all the beauty of love, even where it does exist—that perpetual quarrelling about nothing which is

so much worse than a great explosion because—neither knowing what they are angry for—explanation and reconciliation are impossible.

Hazelhatch's reproachful eyes drove Evelyn mad, and news which she from time to time received from town did not tend to improve her temper.

"We are all much interested," wrote one friend, knowing well that she was writing bitter words, "in the *dénouement* of the little comedy in Portman Square. The lame little heiress is said to be very much *éprise;* but whether he (by the way, isn't he a friend of yours?) will come to time—or to the 'scratch,' as my brother Bob has it—is more doubtful. Of course it would be a capital thing for him, as he cannot have as much money as he spends, and the old Duchess of Rosshire is working heaven

and earth for it. Dear old Rossy is rather in love with him herself, I think. In fact, a good many people seem to be. I confess I hardly know how he has become so popular. But he is quite an institution now, I declare; goes to all the best houses, leads cotillons, drives the best coach, *and*, my dear, they do say that that lovely girl at the Bandbox Theatre—you know the one, all covered with diamonds, with enormous blue eyes—*belongs to him!* But this, of course, I don't know about. I hear the old Ladies Maryland are in despair; but, of course, they can't do anything, as our little lame friend is of an obstinate nature."

After some twaddle about other people, the fair correspondent returned to the charge in a postscript:—

"Concerning this invincible Mr. H., it seems that no class is safe from him, for I

hear that even a young woman Lady Theodora has lately engaged as secretary or companion is, or was, a prey to his fascinations. Bob, who has just come in, says that they are laying 7 to 4 on the marriage coming off. They sat together all last night at Lady Pegwell's, and were riding together this morning."

It must be admitted that all this was rather aggravating to our poor lady at Braye, living alone with a husband who adored her, and who would insist on obtruding his unwelcome adoration. She had, of course, sent many notes to Hereward since his departure, and the answers had been alarmingly brief. Of Lady Theodora there had been no mention; but, after the receipt of the letter just quoted, she took the bull by the horns, and wrote:—

"Am I to congratulate you on having caught the heiress? Of course, in one sense, I should be glad to do so. But, Granville, I think I have a right to demand that you should tell me the truth. You scarcely can mean me first to hear of it from the *Morning Post*. I am told it is settled.

Mr. Hereward had a great and not unjustified belief in Evelyn's utter want of scruple, and so at once answered:—

"There is not a jot or tittle of truth in it. Of course, if I were obliged to do so distasteful a thing, I should tell you at once. It is unlike you, Evelyn, to suspect me of such duplicity. Rest assured that I am incapable of deceiving you."

This made things seem a little better; but the very next post brought a letter

from Miss Newsbury, who had gone to town to see the plays, which spoke of the matter as nearly settled:—

"They are never apart," she wrote. "He lunches in Portman Square every day, and dines there three times a week. Her box at the Opera is his, and to see them spooning at balls and parties is the funniest thing imaginable. Thirty thousand a year, they say! I always declared Mr. Hereward was a clever young man."

It was just after she had read this letter that her husband conceived the unlucky project of coming to an explanation with her. He was in the state of the malefactor who gives himself up to justice, so unbearable is his constant fear of being detected.

"I can stand it no longer, Evelyn," he said, standing before her in her sitting-

room. "What is it that has come between us? Do you love me no longer?"

A devil took possession of her; a light of cruelty came into her eyes—a mocking, hard smile upon her lips.

"I do not."

"Did you ever love me?"

The agony in his voice would have touched most women.

"Never!"

For a moment he could not speak. His lips moved, but no sound came forth. At last the words formed themselves—

"Why—why did you pretend to?"

"Because I wanted to marry you—because I wanted to be Lady Hazelhatch—Lady Lorton—a countess. That is why."

In moments of supreme agony an artificial calm often comes upon one. So was it now with this unhappy husband. She

looked up, startled at the change in his manner, when he again spoke—

"You are honest. Could you not have found some one else to trick? Why did you choose me?"

"Accident, my friend—pure accident. Stanesby happened to be in the market, and you happened to be in the market. My father is a business man, and likes to kill two birds with one stone. So he bought Stanesby, and I married you."

He laughed, but there was not much merriment in the laugh.

"Very business-like. You took me as a convenience, within reach of Stanesby?"

"Exactly."

"But why, may I ask, have you thought it necessary all this time—since the business transaction was completed—to pretend to care for me?"

"Have I done so?" she asked, carelessly.

This upset his calmness for a moment.

"Have you done so? Evelyn, you have fooled me, lied to me, tricked me, till I am mad! Unsay all this; tell me you are acting; and it shall be forgotten!"

"I have nothing to unsay."

"Nothing to unsay?"

"No. Why should you bother me?"

"Because I can live this wretched life no longer; because your coldness is killing me."

"Let us be separated, then. Do you think it is not a wretched life to me too? Do you think because I do not care for you I am incapable of caring for anyone? Do you think——"

"Stay, Evelyn," he cried, catching her arm, "don't go too far!"

She shook off his hand and faced him, her eyes flashing.

"Too far? What do I care how far I go? I am sick of all this; hear the truth. I——"

He interrupted her.

"Tell me nothing; you are excited; tell me nothing!"

She looked at him with a contemptuous glance that made his blood boil.

"At least do not exult in your shame."

"Shame! It is no shame! I glory in it. I love him."

If Hazelhatch had been a working man he would have knocked her down as she stood there in her insolent, cruel beauty and broke his heart; and he would have done well. As it was, he only bowed his head and listened.

"I always loved him. That day that you asked me to marry you I had kissed his lips—had kissed them as I have never kissed yours. He knows me as you have

never known me; he is all the world to me, while you are nothing. I have played a part long enough, and I am not afraid of anything you may do. I was not made for all this gentility and respectability. Why did you marry me? I should have been far happier as his wife. And for you to dare to be jealous of him! Look here, I am honest. I do not believe he cares for me—now. But if he did, if he asked me to go with him to-morrow, I would do so: I would do so even if you chained me up. I am tired of you, Lord Hazelhatch, and your jealousy, and your goodness. I am tired of being your wife; I am weary of simulating affection for you. Do as you please; but at least understand, once for all, the truth."

"I think I do understand it," the man said, in a low, hoarse voice, not raising his eyes. "Have you anything more to say?"

Evelyn had forgotten him. She was thinking of her lover, perhaps even then at the heiress's feet.

"No."

"I cannot trust myself to speak; I will see you to-morrow, or write." And he left the room without looking again at the woman he had loved. *Had* loved!—loved still! That was his curse.

* * * * * *

He wrote to her that night—not an easy letter to compose:—

"I suppose I am bound to believe that you meant what you said. It is difficult to understand with what object you said it, unless it was to ensure a separation between us. To such a course I am willing to consent, on certain terms, which I cannot at the moment specify, but one of which must be that you never see the

person of whom you spoke to-day. On that condition I shall insist, and, unless you are willing to accede to it, it is useless to discuss the matter further. If you will kindly let me know what your wishes are as to residence I shall be obliged."

The household were much interested and mystified by this unaccustomed interchange of notes between his lordship and her ladyship, and, scenting a coming storm, drank a double allowance of beer at supper, in the usual "room" manner of celebrating any event out of the common.

Evelyn's answer was brief:—

"It is too soon to talk of conditions. I can say nothing until I have seen my father, and I shall go to London for that purpose to-morrow. One thing I omitted to tell you yesterday in justice should be told—the person whom your father and

the others saw that night at the West Lodge was I, not Ella. I do not quite understand why she took the blame—out of love for you, I believe."

For nearly an hour after receiving this note Hazelhatch sat still, with his head buried in his hands; then he went to Evelyn's room. As he entered she hastily concealed a letter she was writing under a leaf of her blotting-book, and then stood up, as Marie Antoinette might have stood before her *sans-culotte* accusers—proud, defiant, and splendid.

"Evelyn!" He held out his arms to her, and there was a pathos in his eyes that might have melted her. But she never stirred. "Evelyn, I cannot bear it; I *cannot* live without you. I will forgive all. I love you."

Something approaching to a smile

passed over her face, for the scene reminded her of a passage she had lately read in some novel by either Belot or Zola, and then she turned away from him with a slight shrug of her white shoulders.

"Can a woman be so cruel?" he half asked himself. "At least, Evelyn, for your own sake let all this be forgotten. You cannot mean to bring dishonour on yourself—putting me out of the question. I will forgive all. Let us live on. You shall do all you like, except——"

She flashed round upon him.

"Except the only thing I want? No!"

They say that the crushed worm will turn. At any rate most men can be roused at last, even the most infatuated. Hazelhatch seized his wife's shoulders with a grip of iron, and forced her to look him in the face.

"That one thing you shall never have—never—never—never!"

With each repetition of the word "never," he brought his face nearer to hers, until his lips almost touched her cheek.

She stood still, not shrinking from the pain his unconscious grasp of her occasioned; but with defiance in her eyes and in her set mouth.

No one ever guessed how nearly murder was committed that night in the pretty sitting-room. For one moment Hazelhatch was a madman. His hand seized the white throat; despair and revenge whispered to him that it would be justice, not crime. And Evelyn never shrank. Physical fear was almost unknown to her, and, strange as it may sound, she probably had never admired her husband so much

as at the moment when he was on the point of strangling her.

But, as he stood there, the witchery of her exquisite beauty fell suddenly upon him—her lips were close to his—love conquered fury, and, after one passionate kiss, he cast her away from him and dashed out of the room.

Then Evelyn—having looked in the glass curiously at the marks upon her neck—resumed the writing of the letter which had been interrupted by his entrance; made arrangements with her maid for its being posted in the village at once; and, laying her little head upon the pillow, slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER VII.

HEREWARD WINS.

GRANVILLE HEREWARD was dressing for dinner when the postman knocked, and the servant brought in a quantity of letters, arranging them, with ready tact and knowledge, into certain divisions—bills, cards of invitation, business letters, and little dainty notes. The business letters were read first. One of them announced the turn affairs had taken with regard to the Commercial Credit Association, and Hereward gave a long whistle as he read it, and again as he

perused the cutting from *Glory* which accompanied it.

"Too late to do anything now," he muttered, glancing at the clock. "Poor old Feyler!—wonder what he'll do? I'm well out of *that* hole!" The invitation-cards were left on the table—the letters requesting "the pleasure of Mr. Hereward's company at dinner" were glanced at and thrown down; and then the more interesting part of the budget was taken in hand.

We had better read one of them over his shoulder:—

"I can bear my life here no longer. He is jealous, and we should be unable to meet in the future. I will do as you have so often asked me, Granville. I come up to town to-morrow morning, and shall go straight to Kensington. Meet me at

Feyler House. It had better be abroad at first.

"Your own,

"EVELYN."

Hereward read this somewhat enigmatical note twice over before laying it down. Varying emotions passed over his face; but the last expression was one not pleasant to look upon, so sardonically, cunningly satisfied was it.

"Oho, my lady!" he murmured, beginning to tie his white tie in becoming folds. "It has come to this, has it? I thought it probably would; but—egad! It's a devilish odd world. Everything comes to him who knows how to wait; but sometimes when it comes he doesn't want it. I like green fruit, and she offers it me overripe! Bah! She little knows."

His brougham being announced, he went half way downstairs, and then re-

turned and took up Evelyn's letter. Already he had commenced to tear it up, when, with an exclamation, he desisted, carefully replaced it in its envelope, and put it in his breast pocket. "One never knows," he said; and drove away to Portman Square.

There was no one there but the two old Ladies Maryland when he entered; and, as they cordially detested him, the conversation flagged a little. Then there entered a dark-haired, sad-eyed young woman, dressed very plainly, who started and turned pale as she recognized Hereward. They were formally introduced to each other by one of the old ladies, and Hereward, hearing that the name she was called was not that of Bannerburn, with ready tact refrained from any mention of their former acquaintanceship. Of course Ella knew of Hereward's visits to Portman

Square, but she had hitherto succeeded in avoiding him. By some chance Lady Theodora had omitted to mention to her that he was to dine this evening.

The heiress shuffled into the room in her ungainly fashion, her face lighting up so as to be almost beautiful as she greeted her guest; and they proceeded, a quaint procession, downstairs to the dining-room, Hereward leading the way with the elder of the aunts.

Dinner over, Ella gladly escaped to her own little room; and the old ladies composed themselves in their special armchairs to slumber.

Then Hereward conversed pleasantly—principally of himself, because he knew it was her favourite topic—to the little heiress, and wondered whether the iron was hot enough for striking.

That she liked him he was certain; but

he was not sure that the principal reason for that liking was not that he had never courted her—as the others did; and he was inspired by a wholesome dread lest one hasty word, one affectionate look on his part, might not topple down the whole edifice he had so carefully built up.

They conversed on many subjects—pictures, china, politics, philosophy, poetry, and then again of Mr. Granville Hereward, until the poor young man felt that he had got into a vicious circle, from which there was no escape.

Then a happy thought struck him.

"Do you believe in friendship between a man and a woman?"

"Yes. Do not you?"

"I do. Indeed, I doubt if any man could be quite happy who had not some woman to whom he could confide his secrets, his joys, and his sorrows—obtain-

ing a soft sympathy which a man friend cannot give."

Lady Theodora sighed. Why did she sigh?

"Should you think me very presumptuous, Lady Theodora," went on Hereward, timidly, "if I ventured to ask you to be such a friend to me?"

Lady Theodora's face fell a little, but there was no reproof in it.

"You would think so?"

"Indeed I should not, Mr. Hereward," she said; but again she sighed.

"I have now a difficulty—a serious grief," he resumed, feeling in his breast-pocket, "which none but a clever, sympathetic woman like yourself could understand and advise upon. I—I fancied myself very much in love—till—till—a short time ago. It was wrong, I know; but, believe me, it was not all my fault. I

wanted it all to stop now, before harm could come of it—for her sake more than for my own, but—see, Lady Theodora—a letter I got this morning."

Oh, Evelyn Hazelhatch, if you could have known to what use your letter was put!

The heiress's hand shook as she took the unfortunate note from his.

"Do you love her?" she asked, in a low voice, when she had read it.

"I *did*. But now—no!"

"Poor woman! She is wrong—very wrong, but I pity her."

"Can you not guess why I can love her no longer, beautiful as she is?"

Lady Theodora looked up shyly, and Hereward threw so much expression into his eyes that it is a wonder he was not blind for life.

"I dare not tell you. Let me leave you now, before I——"

"You may tell me," said a voice, so low that he had to bend his head down to hear it; and in another moment he held the heiress to his heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE AND PHILOSOPHY.

HAZELHATCH let his wife leave his house without another word from him. He simply could not believe that she had spoken the truth when she told him of her perfidy and want of heart; and he thought that probably an interview with a man of business like her father would bring her to her senses, and that when she returned, which of course he would counsel her to do, she would retract all those terrible words spoken in her excitement. There are some natures which cannot

quite believe in utter badness, which have a fund of charity and excuse that nothing can exhaust. Hazelhatch, besides, was still in love with this woman, and was therefore as incapable of judging correctly as men in love always are. If—and the bare possibility made him shudder—if there could be any truth in those wild words; well, then, the only thing left for him to do would be to die. Life without her would be intolerable. That was clear enough. As long as it lay in his power to protect her, to protect her was his duty. That was also clear enough. There could be but little doubt that Mr. Feyler would treat the whole thing as a marital quarrel, and give her advice which, if not exactly right, would have some sound sense in it; and then, if she would only give him the smallest chance, how gladly he would for-

give her—how eagerly take her back to his arms! Probably what people used to call "uxoriousness" is contemptible, but it seems based on some good qualities, nevertheless. Strong feeling, no doubt, is almost as harmful to a man in his struggle with the world as passion is in a street row; but it is hard to see why one should despise a man for losing his temper, and thereby "getting one in the eye," or for not being able to live up to the *nil admirari* system. To "keep your head" is no doubt useful, but there is nothing so very admirable in it. The coolest persons are, as a rule, the most selfish persons; they do not keep cool because coolness is a fine quality, they do so because it is best for their interests; and, if they are cool when they themselves are in danger, they may be said to be *frappés*—iced to an extent

scarcely dreamed of by a cornet on a mess committee—when their friends only are in danger.

No one, seeing Lady Hazelhatch drive up to the station in her pony-carriage that morning, would have supposed that she was committing moral and social suicide. She looked so calm—so handsome. Her manner to the station-master and porters—who were devotedly in love with her—was as gracious as ever; her parting instructions to the little groom—also her slave—were as pleasantly condescending as usual.

It was a habit with her to try to captivate those she met; for smiles cost nothing, and she had always been impressed with that highly moral story in the Scriptures which tells us to lay up friends against a rainy day. As the train sped

away past the fields, now browned with many morning frosts, past the comfortable red-brick farms, and the stylish villas, and the quaint old towns, with their more or less hideous places of worship dominating them, as the parsons dominated the snoozing congregations on each succeeding Sabbath-day, she had plenty to think of. Would Granville Hereward come? Oh, yes! He was as much in love with her as ever. It could not be that this ugly heiress had really detached him, for he must know how impossible was an alliance between a Jew stockbroker with no antecedents and the last representative of the Marylands. His audacity she well knew; his popularity in "Society" she also knew; but, *bourgeoise* herself, she rather overestimated the gulf between family and no-family in that Society. The one thing

that had stuck to her of her teaching at Miss Grandy's was the importance of rank. Of course in conversation she sneered at it, but at heart it impressed her deeply; and she had never been able to talk to a duke without a certain nervousness, which, though she concealed it marvellously, she was quite conscious of and angry with herself for feeling. His Grace of Lancashire, leaving a party somewhat perturbed and ruffled at the unwonted snubbing he had received, would have been surprised had he known that the lady's sharp words were caused entirely by her indignant sense of his superiority to herself; that she was, in reality, struggling against a desire to grovel, metaphorically, at his knobby boots. And her art, as opposed to her instinct, was successful. The Duke of Lancashire liked her for her evident

want of appreciation of his great rank; and the invitations she had during her short season in London received to those little parties at Lancaster House, which it required usually so much scheming to attain to, were owing entirely to her snobbish determination not to be a snob. It may be that there are others like her. Toadyism, or tuft-hunting, or whatever it may be called, has more than one way of showing itself.

The man who was "always tying his shoe" outside White's, you may be sure, either became an intimate friend, in his own imagination, of the nobleman who kicked him, or else a republican detesting the effete institutions of his aristocratic country.

When Evelyn arrived at Feyler House, she became at once aware that some-

thing very unusual had happened. There was a scared look on the faces of the butler and two footmen who were deemed necessary for the opening of the front door.

"Mr. Feyler——"

"Very unwell, my lady—suddenly took ill—in his own room, my lady; and——"

"Well?" she asked, sharply, motioning to the footmen to leave the hall. "Well?"

"Well, my lady, I'm afraid there is something wrong. A warrant has been—"

"A warrant—what kind of warrant?"

"Well, my lady, there's a police-officer and two constables in the house; the officer in the room outside Mr. Feyler's—and——"

Evelyn dashed upstairs, and was stopped in the little room the butler had mentioned

by a gentleman in plain clothes, who courteously, but firmly, barred the way.

"I beg your pardon, madam—but your business?"

"Let me pass, sir; I am Lady Hazelhatch, Mr. Feyler's daughter."

"In that case I have no objection," he said, drawing back.

"But what is the meaning of this? Who are you?"

"I am a detective officer—in charge of this case."

"This case?"

"Perhaps you are not aware that a warrant was applied for at the Mansion House yesterday, and granted, for Mr. Feyler's arrest for a fraudulent pretence in connection with the Commercial Credit Association."

Evelyn, too stunned to reply, passed on

to the inner room. Her father, his face ashy white and his lips moving convulsively, was lying on his bed. He opened his eyes as she entered.

"Evelyn!"

"Yes—you can go away" (this was to a nurse). "What does this mean, father? Are you ill?"

"No matter about that—I am ruined."

"Ruined?"

"Yes; some scoundrel wrote about the Company—about the prospectus, you know—and—and—it's all up."

"And the police—the warrant——"

"Police! Warrant!" he exclaimed, wildly, sitting up in bed. "What do you mean? They can't say it's fraud?"

"They do say so, father. There are police in the house now—there is a warrant in their hands for your arrest. Have

you done nothing? Where is your solicitor?"

Poor Mr. Feyler was unable to answer her eager queries, for he had fainted again; but a man coming quietly into the room and standing at her side said—

"All that can be done has been done. Mr. Williamson has been put in possession of all the facts. But it's a bad business, Evelyn. I had no idea he was so deep in this thing; and in other ways he was on his last legs. It's a bad business."

"In money only, Granville?" she asked, turning to him with a gesture of affection he seemed not to notice.

"No—unfortunately not pecuniarily only. I fear that there was something very like fraud too."

"Fool!" said Evelyn, looking at the form upon the bed. "But call the nurse, Granville. There! throw some water on

his face. Does the doctor say there is danger?"

"No, my lady—not immediate; but a telegram was sent to you yesterday."

"I never got it. It must have been misdirected."

"It was sent to Elderby Hall. You were to be there for the hunting."

"And we didn't go. That explains it. Well?"

"Well, my lady, the doctor's to come back this afternoon, because the officer is very anxious to know when he can be moved."

Evelyn shivered. She was not fond of her father; but the idea of his being "moved" hurt her pride.

"There will be bail?" she said to Hereward.

"Of course, if possible; but he must go to be examined as soon as he is well enough."

"Can we not get him away? Surely a bribe——"

"Evelyn," said Hereward, with a gravity that was almost imposing, "I am not going to be a party to anything of the sort."

She bit her lip.

"Come into the next room. Seeing him lying there stifles me. You are better, father?"

"Yes, yes, better—oh, I'm better!" he repeated, in a sing-song way, evidently not quite knowing what he was saying. And Evelyn and Hereward went to the drawing-room. Arrived there, there was an awkward pause.

When a woman has told a man that she is ready and willing to elope with him it is manifestly his duty to say something. But in this case the man said nothing, so the woman had to begin.

"You got my letter?" she said, not

looking at him. For once she was embarrassed, for she loved the man, if one may so desecrate the word.

"Yes, Evelyn, I got the letter." He spoke slowly and in a tone which should have warned her. But *quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat,* and she rushed on her fate.

"And so you came here?"

"I came here directly I heard of your father's illness. I heard last night of the crash, and hoped he would have got away."

"But my letter?" she asked again, trembling in every limb.

It had to be done; but we will give Mr. Hereward the credit of not liking his task.

"Before I say anything about that, Evelyn, I had better tell you a bit of news. I am engaged to be married to Lady Theodora Maryland."

"Since when?"

The words were only whispered, but he could not pretend not to hear them, for her lips were close to his ear.

"Since last night."

"After you got my letter?"

He did not answer. Experience had taught him that words were of little use in scenes of this kind.

"After you got my letter," she repeated, slowly, "you proposed to this woman?"

"Well?"

"Well! Is that how you answer me? Look in my face, Granville, and tell me that you dare do this thing!"

He thought it was time to rouse himself. He did look in her face, and his eye sank before the blaze of fury in hers. But he managed to answer bravely enough—

"Dare! Is there much daring in it?

Do you remember the day when I told you how I loved you—how I would work for you and raise myself to be worthy of you—and you threw me over for your lord? Do you remember the other day when you told me, with a careless laugh, that I might be your lap-dog—or nothing? Do you know what I said to myself then? That you should find that a lap-dog might have teeth. Did you suppose—I scarcely believe you can have supposed, knowing me as you did—that I was a man to be made use of, thrown aside, and whistled back again at your fair pleasure? No, Lady Hazelhatch. You thought I was as big a fool as the husband you caught. You deemed I was made of the stuff of ordinary lovers, flattered by your sweet smiles and pretty words. But you forgot all you yourself had taught me. And you have given in

too late. Even last summer, when that girl came forward, God knows why, to save you from your mad folly—folly committed because you thought your hold over me was loosening (you see I knew you even then)—I say even then such a letter as you wrote me yesterday would have served your purpose. But now it is too late. I have made myself a position. Do you think I am going to knock all that down to suit your caprice? I have gained a fortune. Am I to lose it for your *beaux yeux?* No, no, Evelyn, my dear. Give yourself some of that excellent advice you once gave me. Let us be friends as ever, and go our separate ways. You to love, honour, and obey——

She interrupted him at last. "Enough! And *you* are the man I would have sacrificed all for!"

The scorn in her eyes moved him, as she intended it should.

"Sacrificed all! Yes, when there was no more to sacrifice—when you can no longer bear your life at Braye; when you are weary of your respectability."

"Well, what if I am? Is it for you to reproach me? Oh, Granville, you cannot mean this?"

It was only by repeating to himself the exact sum which he had that morning discovered Lady Theodora was possessed of in ready money that he subdued the passion which her beauty called up.

"Evelyn! Lady Hazelhatch! Do not let us be children. I will forget what you wrote. Let us be friends. This is no time for frivolous talk. The question is how to save your father."

"Say you love me still; say so once,"

she pleaded, holding out her arms to him.

"Mr. Williamson," announced the butler, and the family solicitor, looking very grave, marched into the room.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT THEY SAID IN FOXSHIRE.

OF course the news of the great Feyler smash did not take long to travel to Foxshire, and, after some pardonable hesitation, Hazelhatch took train and hurried to London after his wife. To say that he was miserable is to say nothing. He was simply stunned by her words, which were photographed in his mind, as it were, and appeared to him, sleeping and waking, with dreadful reiterance. And yet, being a weak man—a man totally unfitted to succeed in life—a man who thought of others before himself—he recognized the

duty that devolved upon him, let Evelyn love him or not, to help her and stand by her in the hour of trouble. Perhaps he had a sort of hazy notion that trouble would soften her—would bring out the good that *must* be in her. *Must*, else how could he love her so much? The fact that he said this to himself will show what the man's nature was. He simply could not realize the plain truths that have been taught us by endless illustrations, beginning with Delilah and ending with—well, never ending—but perhaps aptly illustrated by the son of the rich Parisian ex-butcher, who blew out his brains on discovering the falsity of one whose profession was to be false.

Angels from heaven have given up their pleasant habit of descending upon the earth, but in all verity had one appeared

to him and painted Evelyn in her right colours it would have been, in sporting phrase, six to four on his disbelieving the winged personage. Probably one of the reasons for Hazelhatch's folly was that he was possessed of none of that "pride" which sounds so well, and which makes men and women who are deceived take to deceiving in revenge. "Il faut se faire valoir." That was a motto which should have been written up where he might daily see and inwardly digest it. He thought Love was a splendid animal—a Pegasus with golden mane and tail—and never suspected that it is but a hybrid, a mule among mythical creatures, that produces nothing after its kind.

When he arrived at Feyler House, and was received with all the solemn decorum which highly-salaried servants—equal to

any emergency—know how to throw over even such a hateful and vulgar thing as pecuniary difficulty, he was at once shown into the room where his wife sat.

She looked up at his entrance, and then, being literally broken down by trouble and disappointment and impotent anger, burst out crying. In a moment she was in his arms.

"My darling, my poor Evelyn! Uusay all those bitter words! You did not mean them?"

"But, Harry, they were true."

"Well, what has happened I can forgive —I do forgive. But it was not true that——"

"That I intended to do you any more wrong? No, that is not true."

For a moment, looking into her husband's honest eyes, she almost felt that she meant her words—she almost forgot

the reason why she had forsworn her love —she almost thought the grapes were sour, not out of reach.

"We may be happy yet," said he, choking with suppressed emotion. "The past may be blotted out, Evelyn, and you know, or you will know, how I love you. Where is your father?"

"He is still very ill; but the doctor says he may be moved to-morrow or next day."

"Moved? Where to?"

"Have you not heard?"

"I heard something—an absurd charge of fraud; a——"

"It is all true. He has to appear before the magistrate directly he is well enough."

"Oh, my poor child—my poor child!"

She again burst into tears—her nerves were strangely unstrung—but the tears were not for her father.

Notwithstanding the terrible disgrace which seemed to be hanging over them—for Hazelhatch, now that they were in trouble, identified himself as he had never done before with his wife's family—the unfortunate husband had probably not been so happy for many months as he was during that week he spent in the house at Kensington. Evelyn, really overcome by his generous kindness, was soft and affectionate; Mr. Feyler was grateful. It seemed a consolation to him that one lord at least should disbelieve in his guilt; and there was much to be done—many ways in which he could make himself useful. The examination before the magistrate was got over, and much other disagreeable business, and when the Hazelhatches moved to Braye they took the old man with them, he having been admitted to bail to a large amount. Granville Here-

ward was, of course, the first person he applied to for this favour, and perhaps Hazelhatch was the only one of the three in Feyler House who was astonished when the refusal came.

"You see," wrote Hereward, "my position, engaged as I am to Lady Theodora Maryland, is a very difficult one, and I am obliged to be circumspect. Of course, my dear Feyler, I shall never forget the many kindnesses I have received from you; but I am sure that you will perceive my extreme difficulty in this matter."

However, the bail was procured, and Mr. Feyler, the wreck of his former self, having lost nearly all his swaggering self-complacency, accompanied them to Braye Lodge. Stanesby Manor was in the hands of the creditors, as, indeed, had been the house in London some days before they left it.

Foxshire was naturally much excited by the break-down of the golden calf they had, after the Hazelhatch marriage, agreed to set up and worship; and naturally, with the rancour of self-befooled ones, threw more dirt than was quite justified. For, at any rate, the supposed millionaire had paid his way nobly in the county, subscribed largely to local charities, built labourers' cottages, improved farms, organized a workman's reading-room, got up children's teas, and otherwise fulfilled the duties of his position.

"My dear duchess," said Miss Newsbury, when visited by her dowager grace of Ross-shire, "I am told that he owes the unfortunate butcher in the village twelve hundred pounds."

"What a villain!" said the duchess, wishing she could ever dream of getting credit for so much with any butcher—for

her dowry was in her estimation scanty, as what dowager's is not?—"What a villain! But one could see that the whole thing was a sham from the first. How that poor dear Lorton could have been so taken in I cannot understand. And what is this scandalous story I hear about Evelyn —about Lady Hazelhatch?"

To be called by your Christian name by the duchess was to mount many steps in the social ladder.

To be *surnamed* again by her, that was a dreadful fall.

Now there was a good deal of human nature in Lady Theodora Maryland, and, besides, she had made no definite promise to respect the secrecy of the confidence her *fiancé* had reposed in her. So an inkling of the true reason of Evelyn's sudden journey to London had reached not a few people. Miss Newsbury was

not often behindhand in news of this kind. So she replied—

"Too true, my dear duchess. She made a desperate attempt at the last, just after his engagement, you know; went to his house and refused to leave. I believe he had at last to send for a policeman, and then she went into hysterics, and they took her to her father's house, and locked her up, and telegraphed for Lord Hazelhatch. It's a very sad story altogether."

"What are we to do about the ball?" asked the duchess, when they had pursued this subject for some time, much to their mutual gratification.

"It seems to me that a painful duty will again fall upon the committee. It is a curious thing that *this* time that young man, Mr. Hereward, is connected with it."

"Yes; but I don't think he——"

"Oh dear, no! I know him well; an

excellent young man, with principles, which are so rare nowadays. I declare I asked young Charlie Arlton the other day why he didn't come to church—you know his father's, Lord Hellibore's, house is almost next door to St. Gregory's—and he said, 'Because somehow—I suppose I'm stupid—but I never can see the fun in it other fellows do; you can meet the women at tea afterwards just as well.'"

"Shocking!" exclaimed Miss Newsbury, who never went to church except when in Foxshire, or occasionally in London to hear some preacher who was reckoned to be exceptionally unorthodox or irreligious. An irreligious parson is such a capital guest at a "clever" dinner party. There is a piquancy about his irreverence to which no lay heathen can ever hope to attain.

"But about the ball, my dear?"

"I do not think," said Miss Newsbury, reflectively, holding her cup of tea in her hand—"I do not quite think we can go so far as to exclude her. You see, as long as her husband——"

"Oh, I've no patience with Harry Hazelhatch. His father's bad enough in many ways, but I must say that he wouldn't behave in this mean-spirited manner. And he can't even say it is for the sake of his child, as he hasn't one."

Eventually it was decided that an invitation to the ball could not yet be refused to Lady Hazelhatch; but it somehow became known throughout Foxshire that she was supposed to be trembling on the verge of the Precipice of Ostracism, and Miss Newsbury—who would almost have taken away her own character rather than take away none at all—told the tale of the projected flight, and the police interference,

&c., at so many tea-tables that the marked coldness with which she was now everywhere greeted could not escape Evelyn's knowledge.

At first she said to herself that she did not care; that their liking or disliking was absolutely nothing to her; but, at last, the dulness of her life, the wearisome maunderings and complainings of her broken-down father, and the, to her, scarcely less wearisome affection of her husband, nearly drove her mad. Life seemed to have so little attraction left. She had lost the only man she cared for, she could ever care for. Her prospective wealth had vanished at a blow, and not only that, but her "position," for which she had sacrificed so much, she felt, was slipping from her. Her habits changed. She gave up hunting; she gave up doing any more of the "Lady Bountiful" business, of

which she certainly had never done very much; she abstained from calling on anyone; and she refused all admittance to her.

There she sat—in her room upstairs—generally with a French novel in her hand, looking lovely and supremely ill-tempered. Her moods became so variable, too, that poor Hazelhatch lived in an agony of apprehension.

The reckless way in which she avowed her hatred of life alarmed him; while her fits of causeless rage with him were very painful, and the semi-hysterical state in which he often found her—particularly at night—filled him with fears. In vain he did all he could to induce her to see a doctor; she seemed to have a morbid horror of taking this sensible step, and became so furious whenever he returned to the subject that at last he gave it up

in despair, and was fain to watch her health growing daily worse, and her hysterical moods becoming more and more frequent.

CHAPTER X.

HYSTERICS.

THE day of the trial of the directors of the Commercial Credit Association was approaching; leaders were appearing in all the daily papers, all of them most adverse to the incriminated ones, and everything pointed to a sensational case.

Touching and heartrending stories—mostly apocryphal—were going the round, of widows and orphans reduced to beggary; while those Clubmen who know everything went about naming exactly the sum—an enormous one—that had been settled on Lady Hazelhatch, and which

was, therefore, safe; and could tell you the name of the steam-yacht which was lying off the coast, and ready to embark Mr. Feyler in case there was danger of conviction. As a matter of fact £5,000 a-year was all that was settled on Evelyn, and one of the most frequent causes of quarrel between her and her husband was the determination of the latter to give up two-thirds of this sum to the creditors. This, however, he could not do without her consent, and that, she vowed, nothing should extract from her.

"It is enough that I married a beggar; but I shall not reduce myself to the same condition."

"But, my dear, in common honesty——"

"In common honesty, do you think our bargain should not be carried out? To live and starve with you was certainly no part of my bargain."

"Damme, sir," said old Lord Lorton, to Mr. Graines, after an interview with Hazelhatch—"damme, sir, she's a bad 'un! I wash my hands of her. I never knew a woman yet with any sense of fairness or justice; but, by Gad, she has the soul of a usurer. She's thrown back, depend upon it—old Feyler's father was a cent. per-center. That must be it."

It was deemed expedient for all the Braye Lodge party to remove to London for the trial, although at first Evelyn refused to go. But the dulness of her present life was so great that eventually she consented, and, early in March, they went to a small house near Belgrave Square that Hazelhatch had taken.

Probably they could not have done a worse thing. Evelyn naturally read all kinds of emotions in the faces of those

acquaintances she could not help meeting every day when she went out. Pity it generally was, and pity she could not bear. So she shut herself up, after the first day or two, more determinately than ever, and at last grew so ill that Hazelhatch made up his mind that she should be seen by a doctor. So he introduced to her, as an old friend, a medical man in whose skill he had great confidence, and this person made himself so agreeable, being interested in the case, that he was permitted to call often upon her; and even on several occasions was present at one of her fits of ungovernable rage, followed by hysterics, and accompanied by meaningless bursts of incoherent words.

"Is it—don't be afraid to tell me the truth—is it her mind?"

"I can give you no answer yet. Let

me go on calling as I do now, and warn anyone who might meet and know me not to address me as 'doctor.' I will tell you honestly what I think in a few days."

What he could want with the French maid puzzled Hazelhatch; and he, probably, would have been more puzzled still had he known that a sufficient sum of money passed between the doctor and that volatile young person to seriously lessen the gains of this especial professional service. The young person bought a bonnet of terrific smartness, and added a tidy sum to the accumulations which were eventually to regain for her Paris, and her lover; and the doctor smiled to himself as one day he drove up to the Hazelhatches' house.

"Lady Hazelhatch is in her room," said the husband, meeting him in the hall. "She was very bad last night—it really

was raving—quite causeless anger; and, at times, I really feared she might harm herself in her violence. It is terrible work, doctor—terrible. Now she seems calm, but very unwell and shaky."

"I do not anticipate any difficulty in curing her," said the doctor, sitting down, for they had gone into the little back-room called a "study." "But is it necessary for your lordship to know the exact truth."

"You can cure her?"

"Yes—I think and hope so; but firmness will be required. I confess the case puzzled me at first; but, from some facts I have just discovered, I find that my first suspicions were correct, and it is all as clear as noonday. You have only one thing to do."

"I know—keep her from all worry and excitement and grief; but it is almost impossible, at present, for me to do that."

"No—that is not what I meant; you have only to keep her from—the brandy-bottle."

CHAPTER XI.

IN KENSINGTON GARDENS.

MR. FEYLER and his co-directors were found guilty and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, Feyler's term being eight years. By a coincidence one of the newspapers which announced the result also contained the following interesting paragraph:—

"The marriage of Lady Theodora Maryland, with Mr. Granville Hereward, is fixed for the ninth of this month. The ceremony will be performed by the Bishop of South Wales, and the breakfast will take

place at the bride's residence in Portman Square. We understand that the best man will be His Effulgent Highness, the Crown Prince of Bulmelia. The happy couple will proceed for their honeymoon to Gadstrode, which has been placed at their disposal by the Duke of Tedcastle. The bridesmaids are to be eight in number, as follows: Lady Venetia Vancouver, the Ladies Mabel and Corrinne Sweetapple, Lady Claribel Seytagenet, Lady Clara Vere de Vere, Lady Guinivere Trumpington, and the Ladies Fridoline and Fanny de Lyon. A magnificent parure of diamonds has been presented to the bride by Mr. Hereward's tenants in Dorsetshire, together with an illuminated address."

The reading of this did not make Evelyn very agreeable company, and it was perhaps unlucky that Hazelhatch should have chosen the very moment when she

had laid down the newspaper to come in and, for the hundredth time, to broach the subject of giving up her fortune to the creditors.

He had not been able to believe, still less to act upon, the hint of the doctor. He never was aware of any alcohol in her possession, and it did not occur to him to suspect the innocent-looking French girl. But certainly her fit of passion this morning was scarcely to be put down to anything but madness—or what the doctor had said. Weary and desperately sad, he at last, in sheer despair, left the house, and, wandering aimlessly on, found himself in a secluded part of Kensington Gardens.

We are few of us aware of the pretty bit of country we have in the midst of our town. Even in his then mood the sudden calm, the beauty of the burst of spring

vegetation, the songs of the birds, brought a sense of relief to him, and, as he threw himself on the grass under a magnificent old tree, there was a something in his heart that negatived the despair which had a few moments before filled it with utter darkness.

And yet life was bitter to him in all conscience. At length—and tardily enough it must be owned—he had realized that the splendour of his young dreams, of his golden fancies, was a mockery and a delusion. The moment of awakening comes to us all, and it is the saddest one of our lives. We soon get accustomed to the knowledge, and are able to extract pleasure, even romance, out of the work-a-day world; but that awakening to the fact that it *is* a work-a-day world, and not a world of glory and of hope—that is intensely sad.

As Hazelhatch sat under that oak-tree, he certainly had no happy thoughts for his companions. His wife was scarcely a pleasant subject to think upon, though even yet he refused to believe or to acknowledge to himself that his love for her was dying—was nearly dead. Then he felt the disgrace of Mr. Feyler's conviction very deeply, carefully as he hid the feeling from Mr. Feyler's daughter. Lord Lorton's affairs, too, had become very desperate of late, his lordship having had a persistent run of ill-luck both at cards and racing; and there was every likelihood of the event which his marriage was to have averted coming to pass after all. And Ella? He could scarcely bear to think of her—to remember that evening in Braye Park when she had sacrificed herself to save him sorrow. The remembrance of

her sweet, sad face as he rode past her—on the last occasion when they had met, when he rode past her without a word, deeming her unworthy—came between him and his conscience. That she had long forgiven him he knew well; but how could he ever forgive himself for having doubted her, for having deemed she was as—as his own wife? And as he compared the two women—the one silently bearing an unmerited sorrow which love for him had brought upon her, and the other lying there with a French novel in her hand, reviling him and cursing at Fate—he shuddered.

Twenty times since Evelyn had told him the truth about that fatal evening had he taken up a pen to write to Ella and beg her forgiveness; but each time he had abandoned the attempt in despair, being utterly unable to find words in which to

express himself. A feeling of loyalty—loyalty *quand-même*—debarred him from saying a word against the woman who bore his name; and yet how otherwise could he speak? So that Ella knew not that her fair fame in the eyes of the man she loved had been righted.

A heavy shower came on; and, as even a man in despair dislikes a ducking, Hazelhatch rose and walked towards that pavilion-like edifice near the end of the Row, where on occasions buns and ices are distributed to the *élite* of the shopocracy. There were one or two persons there, also sheltering from the rain, when he entered, and it was not till he had stood moodily there for some minutes, watching the driving clouds and surveying the scurrying horsemen and women flying to shelter, that he turned to look at his companions. Then he started, and the blood left his

cheeks. Yes—it was she. In a tight-fitting dark dress, plain enough, but looking like an aristocrat to the tips of her fingers. She had not recognized him, and he could look at her for a minute undisturbed. There were rings round her eyes—he could see that through her veil—and her cheeks were very pale; but the exquisite beauty of expression was there, not at all marred by the sadness that now characterised it.

She raised her eyes, and they met his.

"Miss Bannerburn!"

"Lord Hazelhatch! I—— Isn't this rain provoking?"

No one in the summer-house would have guessed but that they were two every-day acquaintances.

"Yes; but it's a good thing for the country."

"Oh, is it?"

"Yes; it was very hard. They will be able to hunt another week or ten days."

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

She scarcely knew what she was saying for nervousness, and he was much in the same condition; only with him it took the form of a necessity for saying something, however common-place.

"You are staying in town?"

"Yes; but I am not sure how long. You know my—Lady Theodora Maryland—is going to be married."

"Ah, I had forgotten. But you will understand with all our trouble that I haven't had much time to think of such things."

"I have been—I am—so very sorry for you, Lord Hazelhatch, and for Lady Hazelhatch. How does she bear it?"

A feeling of anger that Ella's pity should be thrown away took possession of the man.

"Bear it! She thinks of nothing but herself."

"Hush!" said Ella, seeing that several of the people near them looked round when he raised his voice.

Just then the sun burst out from behind a cloud, and the rain had almost ceased to fall.

"Come out and walk a little, Miss Bannerburn—Ella; I have something to say to you."

Ella hesitated. The beating of her heart warned her that she should say no; yet what harm could there be?

"I will not keep you long," he said, with a mortified humility which touched her.

"I will come," she said, simply; and they walked down towards the Serpentine together.

Not knowing how to begin, he plunged *in medias res* at once.

"I know all, Ella."

"All? What?"

"About that night at the Lodge, when you——"

She put out one hand, so small and well-shaped—and, as he saw the gesture, the day when first that little hand had nestled in his own came vividly back to Hazelhatch—and said,

"Please say nothing more. I cannot be quite sorry you should know the truth, if—if——"

"If it has not prevented my enjoying my domestic felicity!" he interrupted, fiercely. "No; that has continued. She told me the truth herself, rather proud of it. But"—and his tone changed to one of piteous appeal—"but how shall I ever forgive myself for doubting you, Ella?"

"You could not help it," she said, with her eyes down.

"Why did you do it?"

She looked at him for a moment—only one moment. A life-time! A heaven of sudden inspiration—a hell of vain remorse. "Too late!" was written in their eyes—those words that pursue half of us, the real curse of the fall.

It was some time before either spoke again. They were standing on the banks of the Serpentine, and the dogs noisily fetched sticks from the water, and came back to sprinkle their owners with the spray from their shaggy coats; and the merry boys sailed their miniature yacht-races across the mimic sea, pursuing their favourites with long crooks and glances of admiration; and behind them a mass of fashionable humanity emerged from the trees, where they had taken refuge from the rain, and re-commenced their simpering, and staring, and small talk, and scan-

dal; and there they two stood, as much alone as though they had been landed on a desert island, with no speculation in their dreamy, wistful eyes, gazing into space, and only seeing reproduced the words that were eating into their hearts—"Too late!"

At last the man knew her. Suddenly the scales of self-deceit were cast aside, and he saw her as she was—as she had always been; and as he woke to this consciousness he also woke to know that he had lost her; that the very feeling that was now—known to each other by the electricity of love—stirring each of their breasts, was in itself the barrier that must part them.

He spoke first, in a broken voice.

"Ella, do you pity me?"

She would not pretend, as a smaller nature would have done, to believe he

alluded to his miserable home. She knew that he, like her, was thinking of their forbidden love, and answered,

"God knows I do, and myself—and myself!"

Let it be recorded in Hazelhatch's favour that at this supreme moment he never yielded a jot to the terrible temptation that came over him—that his chief feeling was to save her further pain.

They had said nothing. Not a word of love passed between them; but when at last—after another long pause, during which their eyes had again met for an instant—Ella said "Good-bye," they both knew well what it meant.

Could a stranger have been present he would have said they were a rather *gauche* young couple, who had no subjects in common. How little would he have guessed what that "Good-bye"—those two words

which we use so carelessly, and which are so beautiful in their kindliness—meant. It meant to the man the closing of a book of happiness which long ago he had looked into, not understanding, and which now he could, were it not forbidden him, read with his heart. It meant to the woman a final farewell to a joy which had been always present to her; but which now that in one sense it became possible, became also —duty-ordained—more impossible than ever.

"Good-bye!" It seemed a simple thing, that parting by the Serpentine; the gentleman just touching the lady's hand, the lady so calm and dignified; and Policeman X 222, who was cracking nuts hard by, little dreamed that within a few yards of him two human hearts were near to breaking.

"You are right—good-bye," he said,

answering her unspoken thoughts. "I *could* not bear to meet you."

"We must part, Harry——" She lingered over the familiar name; and it required all his strength of resolution to avoid catching her to his heart. "But," she went on, "I am glad we have met once more, if only to say good-bye as friends. You believe that I have your good at heart?"

"Ella!"

"I do wish you to be happy, Harry; but happy in the right way. There are many things to make you so—yes, there are—not pleasures, I don't mean that; but duties, work, the good of others; and, Harry—you won't mind my saying it?"

"How could I mind?"

"And there is religion, too, Harry. I have no right to preach, for I am far from good; but—but—oh, it would make me so happy to think that you sometimes

thought of such things. We might, you know, be together in spirit sometimes then."

"I would do anything for your sake," he said, in a low voice.

"And yet not for my sake, Harry. Not only for that, though that I should be the means of making you think of such things would be a pride to me. Don't be despondent; do believe that life is good enough, if we take it rightly. In the many dark days I have had—and they have been very dark at times—I have always kept before me the bright end, which must come, Harry—which must come. Nothing can stop it. We shall meet some day with nothing between us."

There was a light upon her face as she said these words—almost triumphantly—that stopped the expressions trembling on Hazelhatch's lips.

"Good-bye, now." And again her hand was held out.

That kind of helpless despair that comes upon us as we stand by a bedside and see our loved one pass away, perhaps in agony, while we are helpless, with all our love, and all our readiness to die instead, came upon Hazelhatch's heart as he took the little hand stretched out to meet his.

"O God!" he cried, and Ella trembled as she saw his face and heard his voice; "what have I done to bear this? Why have I been blind all this time, when I had happiness in my grasp, and let it go! O God! Too late!—too late!"

"Harry, dear," she whispered, as her fingers closed on his; "it is never too late —too late to pray; too late to conquer fate, to conquer suffering. I shall pray for you. Will you not believe that my prayers may do good?"

"I will believe in them as I would in the prayers of an angel."

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

And they went their several ways, Hazelhatch elbowing his way across the fashionable stream, and causing much talk about the Feyler case by his *égaré* air and haggard eyes; and Ella walking up towards Portman Square, her heart full, but not altogether full of bitterness. To a pure woman only is it given to sacrifice her heart for the sake of her affection.

She had once before given up her name for his sake; was it not a further glory to her that she could now cast away from her the joy which she saw was in a manner possible?

And Lady Theodora, occupied as she was with her trousseau, and the thousand other arrangements consequent on the

marriage of so great a little person, found time that evening to wonder at the charming spirits of her companion, and remarked to her *fiancé*—when Ella had gone to her room—that really Miss Berners, when she had a little colour, was uncommonly pretty. To which Mr. Hereward replied something that called up in the heiress a blush and a giggle, which we, as a faithful historian, cannot pronounce to have been in any way beneficial to *her* style of beauty.

CHAPTER XII.

GEORGE NEWSBURY HEARS THE TRUTH.

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—I want particularly to speak to you. Will you come over here to-morrow?

"Yours ever,

"HAZELHATCH."

This was the note put into George Newsbury's hand one morning as he was sitting down to breakfast. Opposite him was his aunt, Miss Newsbury, who had come on one of her short visits, prior to flitting to London for her season of gossip and tea.

"From Braye, isn't it, George?" she inquired. Having been down first, she had had an opportunity of glancing over the outside of her nephew's letters.

"Yes—from Harry. He wants me to go over and see him. I'll go this morning. Poor old chap! I expect he has a hard time of it."

"Hard time of it! Well, he deserves all he gets. If a man will go and marry out of his class——"

"My Aunt Polly, you were one of the keenest about it, and such a pal of hers!"

"Don't be a donkey, George. Of course I had to be civil to her as long as she conducted herself properly; but when, as the duchess very correctly says——"

"Oh! bother the duchess!" said George, irreverently. "Give me another cup of tea."

"When, as the duchess says, she takes

especial pains to outrage every sense of decency we possess, then it is only due to remember to draw a line."

"That doesn't make it any better for Harry. Have you heard anything of the Lortons lately?"

"Yes. I hear that he has become Chairman of the Committee of the English Club at Brussels, and is making a fool of himself, playing as usual. Of course all the English snobs run after them. To my mind," added the old lady, buttering a piece of toast viciously, "there is nothing so pitiful as a titled pauper."

"Yes; it's devilish hard lines for the old chap—such a good fellow, too—so generous and——"

"There is nothing so easy as to be generous when you have nothing," enunciated Miss Newsbury, thinking of the sharp answer she had written to a starving

gentlewoman who had appealed to her.

"Why, Aunt Poll, you're just like a copy-book—full of wise saws, &c., 'Prevarication is the soul of business,' and all that sort of thing, you know. But have they left Braye yet? I have heard none of the county news since I came back from Leicestershire."

"No; they're not going to. Another piece of affectation; as if better people than they didn't let their houses. Mr. Graines, the agent, who has robbed them to a pretty tune, I expect, is to live there, and keep the place up in a sort of scrubby way. I certainly cannot understand how Lord Hazelhatch can stand living on in the Park and seeing everything going to decay without being able to prevent it."

"Why shouldn't he prevent it? His wife had £5,000 a year settled on her, hadn't she?"

"Yes; the old swindler of a father did that, so as to cheat his creditors a little more effectually; but Harry Hazelhatch, like the born fool he is, insisted on giving up all but £1,000 a year of it. I hear they had terrible work to get her ladyship's consent, but they did get it at last. The absurd things people said about it, too—as if there was any credit in giving up what isn't your own."

"It's devilish hard to please you, aunt," said Newsbury, laughing, "hit high or hit low;" and he rose, hungering, after the wont of his kind, for a pipe in the stables.

"Do try to see Evelyn Hazelhatch," cried Miss Newsbury after him as he went, "and tell me all about her. Some people say she has gone mad; others that she has had a stroke of paralysis, and is disfigured. My idea is that she has taken to drink."

"I wonder why some people," muttered George to himself, as he closely inspected the doubtful sinew of a hunter, "never have a good word for anyone."

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said the helper, standing by with the bandages in his hand.

"Oh, nothing. Put the saddle on Molly in half an hour."

When he reached Braye Lodge, he was shown into Hazelhatch's "den," where he found the proprietor hard at work at the house accounts. This sight brought him at once to one point he intended reaching during his visit. After some preliminary observation, quoth he—

"I say, old chap, I've heard—I mean, they say—that since you gave up all that, you know—(devilish fine thing it was, too!)—you are what you may call rather —rather hard up."

"Well," said Hazelhatch, smiling at the other's embarrassment, "yes, we are rather. You see, I was rather extravagant, and got a bit into debt, otherwise we should be all right. Directly what we owe is paid off we shall have ample. But, you see, the law costs were uncommonly heavy."

"Did you pay them?"

"Yes; who else was to? It was my place."

"I wish," went on George, blushing to the roots of his hair, "you would let me help you a bit, old chap—to be paid off whenever you please—a loan, you know. I've a great deal more than I know what to do with. Indeed, I was saying only the other day to my lawyer chap that it was—in fact, that having so much money lying about was devilish inconvenient."

"Not a bad sort of inconvenience," said the other, laughing, and holding out his

hand; and, though he laughed, there was something very like moisture in his eyes. "Many, many thanks, dear old George; I *would* ask you if I wanted help, but I don't; we have quite enough now that the horses and things are sold."

"Horses sold!" cried George, aghast. "Do you mean to say you are going to give up hunting?"

"Hunting is a luxury, George. I am going to give up all luxuries."

"It's not a luxury. In Foxshire it's a necessity. But shan't you keep anything?"

"No—not in the stables. Except Evelyn's ponies. I hope to persuade her to do a little driving about again soon."

"How is she, Harry?"

Hazelhatch's brow darkened.

"She is far from well, George—far from well."

"It must have been a great shock to her. Awful!"

Hazelhatch said nothing, and George hastened to change the subject.

"But what was it you wanted to see me about?"

"Something I ought to have told you before; but—but it is difficult to tell."

And then he told George the whole truth about that night outside Hereward's house, concealing nothing, but turning his head away as he spoke of his wife's part in the matter.

"And Ella was driven away for this?" cried George, at the conclusion of the story.

"Not exactly driven away. But it oozed out, as you know, and ill-natured things were said; and the Duchess of Ross-shire took it up; and altogether she had to go. You see everyone, even my

father and mother, with whom she was living, believed in it. How could they help doing that?"

"Couldn't one kill Hereward?" said George, between his set teeth.

"I must ask you to say nothing to anyone."

"I have promised; but I may tell Ella I know it?"

Hazelhatch paused. Even had he not been aware of it, the man's face would have told him the truth.

"Yes, George."

"Thank you," and George stood up.

"Where are you going?"

"To London—to see her. She is in Portman Square, is she not?"

"Yes."

"Harry—I—I forgive you; but this has been a wicked business."

"What could I do?"

"I don't know; but somehow I should have told the truth, I think."

"I couldn't, George. Put yourself in my place."

"I think I should have," repeated the other, doggedly. "Justice ought to come before——"

"Before the honour of one's wife?"

"Yes, I think so. Good-bye. I shall go by to-night's express."

Hazelhatch put his hand on his arm.

"You will ask her to marry you?"

"I shall ask her to forgive me for having doubted her."

"And then?"

"And then—yes, if she can do that, I shall ask her to be my wife."

"She would be a good one, George. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

DURING her stay in Portman Square, Ella Bannerburn, moved hitherto by a longing for anything which would take up her time, and leave little leisure for thought, had taken to the occupation, so dear to many female minds, of what is called "district visiting." The new rector of the parish was one of those energetic men who begin so well, never dreaming how soon they will settle down into the usual groove of monotony when the novelty of reform has worn off; and he gladly welcomed his new assistant—seeing that

she belonged to the few who were earnest, and who did not expect to make war against disease, and misery, and godlessness with rose-water. So Ella was sent into the slums, and saw many a vile sight, and heard many a vile word, and did much good in a gentle unassuming fashion of her own. She had that sympathetic nature which takes effect on other natures however hardened, and a sort of power of putting herself in the place of others, which was irresistible. It was some slight pleasure to her to witness the genuine regret with which her announcement that she was about to leave them all was received; and the emphatic declaration of one sturdy pauper that no other blanked district visitor should ever darken his blank doors to "take away the taste" of herself, was, we fear, not received with a suitable reproof. In general, however,

she set her face against strong language, and the agony some of her poor friends endured in the efforts to restrain the natural impulse was terrible.

"If you won't try to give it up because it's wrong, will you try because I don't like it—because it hurts me? You wouldn't hit or kick me, would you? Well, imagine each of your oaths to be a blow or a kick." That was the sort of argument she used, and it had great effect in one way. Probably, it did not go far in the direction she intended. The martyr to her prudery of language looked upon her, in all likelihood, as a charming young lady, but deplorably eccentric in this one point, and only gave way to this eccentricity on the ground of her other estimable qualities. Lady Theodora, whose ideas of doing good to the poor were of a grand order, and who looked upon charity as a business in

which such things as sentiment were out of place, scarcely relished this conduct on the part of her companion; but, in consideration of her promising always to change her clothes immediately after her rounds, had not thought proper to forbid them. Truth to tell, during the courtship, she was not sorry to feel that there was no possibility of Ella's coming into the room where Hereward was. For the heiress had already woke to the consciousness that that gentleman, however much he might be in love with her, was capable of admiring beauty in others, and she had some vague misgivings as to the nature of the former acquaintanceship between the two.

One night Ella had been sent for to visit the death-bed of a woman who had been in her parish, but had shortly before removed to the other side of the Thames;

and she returned on foot, slowly, and filled with the thoughts that a death-bed scene called up, across Waterloo Bridge. It was late, and there were but few people about; but there was a bright moon, and Ella was not of a timorous nature. A policeman had offered to find her a cab, but she had refused, feeling that the longer she was out in the open air after the fœtid atmosphere of the house she had just quitted the better.

As she passed along, a woman rushed by her with so wild an expression on her face that involuntarily she turned to look at her again. The eyes were bloodshot and staring, as if they saw nothing. The painted lips were muttering inarticulately. On the fallen-in cheeks were bright patches of rouge; false jewellery glittered in her ears; tawdry, torn, bedraggled finery clung about her shrivelled body. Her age might

have been anything between forty and sixty. Ella had not gone district-visiting without meeting some such as she, and knew well the miserable profession to which she belonged.

The woman stopped and looked cautiously round. Seeing Ella, she returned her glance defiantly, and seemed to wait for her to pass on. Ella—not knowing what it was that seemed to chain her to the spot—did move on a few steps, and then turned suddenly. The half-formed suspicion flashed into certainty. The woman had mounted on the stone seat which ran round one of the jutting-out half-circles of the bridge—in another moment she would be on the parapet itself.

How Ella contrived to get there in time to catch the woman's arm, and, just as she was about to make the fatal plunge, to drag her down, she never knew.

"Leave me alone, —— you!" cried the would-be suicide, struggling. "What the —— do you mean by touching me? Let me go, or I'll smash you, by —— I will!" And she screamed and raved; but the other held firm, and at last her passion exhausted itself, a reaction set in, and the wretched creature flung herself on the stone seat, sobbing wildly.

The heavy tread of a policeman became audible.

"Promise me not to repeat this, or I will give you in charge."

No answer.

"Policeman ——"

"No! no!" gasped the woman, catching at Ella's hand. "Don't—don't send me to prison. I daren't be shut up alone. You don't know what it is to be shut up alone—without drink. I'll promise. I don't want to do it now."

And the policeman, surveying the strangely-assorted couple suspiciously, passed slowly by.

Then Ella spoke—

"Why do you want to die?"

The other raised herself so that Ella could see her clearly.

"Why! Look at me! Don't you see what I am?"

"Is that a reason for dying? Do you not believe——"

"I believe nothing—nothing! Nor would you had you suffered as I have done—had you known what it was to have every feeling of delicacy, of refinement, of honour, of everything that makes us different from the animals, gradually crushed out of you; had you known what it was to wander night after night in the streets seeking bread and getting only curses—perhaps blows; had you ever felt you were

—what the world justly called you—a disgrace to humanity, the lowest creature that could exist. Let me die!"

She started from her seat, but Ella easily pushed her down again, for her strength was exhausted.

"Your promise! Remember I believed your word. Will you believe me when I say I am sorry for you?"

"Do not waste your sorrow. I am not worth it. I see you are a lady. I—do not laugh at me—I was one once."

It *was* hard to believe, although there was something in her accent which at times seemed to savour of refinement; but to look at her!

However, let this be as it might, Ella was not inclined to argue the point.

"Where do you live?"

"Live?"

"Yes—your home."

"Home!"

The way the wretched outcast said that word was a sermon in itself. Then she laughed—the exquisite irony of the question tickled her.

"Home!"

Ella was shocked.

"You do not mean you have nowhere to go?"

"Nowhere—but there," and she pointed to the river. "I've just been turned out of where I was by the police. They made a fine raid: But if we *must* exist we must live somewhere. Why don't they kill us—why don't the law kill us?—it'd be more merciful in the end."

Ella was not disposed to—or indeed capable of—entering into this very large subject, and only said—

"If I give you an address, will you go there—at least for to-night?"

"Is it where they'll preach and try to reform me?"

"Surely, if kind people——"

"No! no!" she cried, shrinking away. "I couldn't bear it. Anything rather than that. I'd rather be beaten than preached at. I was as you were once—with a home—a home!—and a husband who loved me—and a big house—yes, and a good name—as good as yours, maybe—and a husband who loved me—me!—and a little daughter—a little daughter—who was taken away from me."

"Taken away?"

"Yes—no—I am lying. I left her. I left her when I left him. I thought I had counted the cost; but I hadn't. The other was a fiend. Of course he grew tired of me. These things are all the same. Why should I tell you all? Here's the result! Look at me! Pity some

young women just hesitating about following what they call their hearts—fools!—can't see me here!" Another of those mirthless laughs that were sad to hear.

"You regret your little daughter?" asked Ella, thinking she had found a soft spot in the battered heart.

"No; I don't think I do. You see, she was only a baby, and I never liked children. I've had 'em since—two girls. One died, and the other——" (the pause was significant)—"the other's alive still. Pity she isn't dead too. No; I don't regret that. I regret the place and the money and the comfort——"

"And your husband?"

"No! Why did he cast me off? If he had shown mercy I should not be here—I might have been a happy woman. Curse him!"

Ella sighed. It seemed so hopeless.

"There—I feel better now," said the other, getting up. "I'm weak for want of food—and of drink. Have you any money?"

"Will you not come with me to——"

"Young lady, I know you mean kindly, and you might do good to some—to some not quite so bad as me. I'm an old woman—it's too late to do anything with me. Do you think I am afraid of anything in another world after what I have endured here? No. You have saved my life, and I ain't sorry after all, for it might have hurt to drown. Give me a little—just enough to buy some food and drink—I'll promise not to spend it all in drink if you like—and let me go. I shall remember you and your kind face. I think it has made me a little better. Let me go now."

"But at least you will let me know when I can see you again?"

The woman paused.

"No, I'd rather not. There's something about you—I can't tell why—that makes me think of the old days, and that drives me mad."

"In vain Ella pleaded and argued; she was inexorable, and at last they went their different ways—the wretched creature crawling back to the Surrey side as fast as she was able, to anticipate the closing of the public-house.

It has been often remarked how small the world is; yet, even allowing this truth, it was a strange freak of destiny that brought these two—mother and daughter—together that night upon the bridge. Together for the first time since the night when a guilty woman touched with her lips the sleeping infant she was about to abandon for ever; when shame darkened the name of Bannerburn and a hus-

band's heart was broken. It was a strange freak of destiny that enabled the daughter's hand to save the mother from a final crime —to avert her rushing, "rashly importunate," into the presence of her Maker.

As Ella walked back to Portman Square under the stars, she was sad enough. Had she known who the woman was she had left crawling to the public-house—crawling back to her life of shame and misery—what would her sadness have been!

They never met again. We—who know all about our characters, even those of the worst description—know that not very long after there happened the unimportant event of an old woman's death in a low lodging-house. Not quite sudden enough to necessitate an inquest—only hunger. That was a common disease there. Then came a pauper's funeral; an over-worked

curate gabbled through the service over a hastily dug-out grave; a workman patted down the earth, and went back to his beer; and that was all!

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER TRY.

"I HAVE waited a long time. I have never ceased to love you, although the remembrance of that time when I doubted you is misery to me. I don't ask for your love; at least not now. I only ask you to try to like me well enough to —to marry me."

The speaker is George Newsbury, and he addresses Ella. The back drawing-room has been given up to them for their interview, which Lady Theodora, who being a woman was of course a match-

maker, hoped would result in Ella's giving way to her obvious destiny.

"You have been very good to me, George—very good. It was not your fault that you doubted. Who would not have doubted? Why, I accused myself."

"But you told me it was untrue, that only you could not clear yourself, and I—fool that I was—thought of all kinds of stupid things about 'my wife,' you know, as if whatever you had done you would not have been a million times too good for me!"

"Oh, no, George! In one sense—perhaps in many—but certainly in one, I am not good enough for you."

"What sense?"

"You deserve a good, loving wife."

"Well?"

"And—and—what is the use of it all,

George? Pity me, despise me, if you will, but I love him still."

She would not beat about the bush; she would not let him think it was otherwise than this. She loved that love which seems so terrible to a girl. She loved "a married man."

For a moment George did not reply; not because he had nothing to say, but because he had so much that he knew not where to begin. And while he pondered she thought—for the first time—whether it would not be as well, after all, to make this man happy, to reward his devotion, and to be, if not happy, at least contented and at ease herself. Ella was scarcely made to be a dependent. Her nature had revolted against even the few slights she had encountered in Portman Square. She valued very highly the good name she had so gladly given away for *his* sake; and she

knew well that it would be impossible to become George Newsbury's wife without the driving away of that mysterious, vague cloud of shame that still hung over her. That would be the result. She could again hold up her head in her beloved Foxshire.

George was a man with whom, though she could not be in love, she could be very happy. Once his wife, her duty—and she called it DUTY in her thoughts—would absolutely require that she should put the other man out of her mind. True that her home would be near his, but surely that would be so much the better; surely it is more noble to overcome than to fly from temptation. Not that she really ever allowed there was any absolute temptation possible. She was one of those pure women—of whom there are many, after all, let cynicism sneer its worst—

women in whom we all believe, though we say such hard, witty, worldly things to the fellows in the club smoking-room; women to whom, in very truth, all things *are* pure. To be tempted—that is to say, to get to the point of feeling there was temptation in the matter—seemed almost as bad to her as to give way to temptation might seem to women of a different order. She was not a woman to be cruel to anyone's shortcomings or to gloat over anyone's fall from their high estate; but the excuses so frequently made for certain frailties would have appealed to nothing but her scorn, so high did she hold the power of her sex to exact respect and to kill the very suspicion of infamy.

"You love him still? But why——"

"Why? Why do we prize the smell of a rose? why does a lovely sunset fill us

with pleasure? why does exquisite music bring tears into our eyes——"

"It doesn't bring tears into mine," put in George, with a certain air of dignified stupidity, which rather became him. "Am I to wait all my life for what I want because of a fancy which—which is only a fancy, and can't be any more?"

"What fancies can be more?" said Ella, more to herself than to him. "Perhaps, when they are possible of realization, they are not such sweet fancies. George"—he started at her change of tone—"why on earth can't you go and fall in love with somebody else?"

"Because, on earth, there is nobody else like you," he replied, with unusual smartness.

"Nonsense! I don't see why, because I have made up my mind to be an old

maid, with a 'history' which young people some day will hear me tell between my gums, (and won't believe), that you should be wretched, and—ridiculous."

"Ridiculous!" and he pulled down his shirt-sleeves with some emotion. "I don't see how I am ridiculous. I want you to be my wife, and ask you to; and you say you won't, because you like a man, who can't marry you, better than me. Well, then, I say that I can bear that—that it is understood I only stand second—but that I want you to be my wife. Your reason might be a good one against my wishing to marry you; but it's no reason at all against your marrying me when I know it, and accept it as inevitable."

"You are quite a logician, George," said Ella, with a half smile.

"I don't know much about logic," he returned, rather hotly, for he resented the

smile and the semi-playful tone; "but I know I am right. Where are you to live? You can't always be a companion, or a governess, you know. Besides, it is quite horrible your doing anything of that kind. And even if you went back to Coalbridge, as dear old Manisty wants you to, you can't well stay there for ever—Bob's just back from India, on leave." He added the last words with a change of manner which would have been most ludicrous to anyone but a woman absorbed in thoughts as serious as Ella.

"Why not?" she thought. This man was loyal and true—a gentleman. Could she, as he said, go on all her life either earning her bread in a most distasteful way, or as a dependant upon the charity of her friends? True, she knew that Hazelhatch loved her. Did not that make it her duty to put a still more insurmount-

able barrier between them? Surely, if George knew exactly the truth, there could be no unfaithfulness to him in her thoughts of the man she loved?

And George went on, little knowing that her arguments within herself were far more powerful than any words he could use—

"But I know you do not care for Bob. Look here, I'm not a clever chap, and all that; but I wouldn't bore you; and—and, dear, you know that I should always remember what you have told me, and not expect you to be very fond of me. You would like me in time, because I would be so fond of you—so fond! Oh, Ella darling, you don't know what this is to me. I can't say things properly, and I haven't got any fine words to use; but I love you just as well."

She left her hand—which he had seized—in his; and he went on, occasionally stopping to press his lips to it—

"I would live wherever you like. In London, if you chose. And I don't mind if I never hunt again, if you want me to give it up. If you don't like Foxshire we'll never see it again. I'll sell Averley; I'll sell my gees—I mean my horses—even old Tam O'Shanter, that you gave the sugar to that day—and—and if you don't like Aunt Polly, I'll cut her—and—oh, Ella, tell me what I can do to be worthy of you?"

When one is hesitating, very trivial circumstances may turn the scale. George Newsbury never knew how much he lost by the mention of his aunt's name. It brought up in the other's breast a flood of bitter memories, and it also brought

the thought of how unwelcome her marriage with George would be to his family. That decided her.

"No, George! No! I ought not to have left you in doubt so long. No! It can never be. We will be friends always, but we can be no more. Believe me, dear, dear George, that I wish it could be otherwise. But it is impossible. Do not be unhappy; there are many better women than I in the world. I won't say I don't like your being so fond of me—I am proud of it, dear George; but I am not fitted to be your wife, or anyone's wife. I shall be an old maid, and when you are married I shall come and spoil your children, and tell them yarns (which they won't believe) of how lovely I was once, and how I used to ride *to*, not *with*, the Foxshire hounds when their papa kept them. Don't, George,

don't; you mustn't be so weak. There are many happy days in store for us both, and we shall live to laugh at the idea that we ever dreamed of being married."

But George, not to be comforted by her assumed raillery, simply put his honest head down on the table, and sobbed.

"I don't care for anything without you," he said.

* * * * * *

At the top of Sloane Street, two men encountered each other, one coming from, the other going to, Tattersall's.

"Hallo, George! You're in a deuce of a hurry. Have you seen Melgrave's horses? I hear they're a nice lot."

"No, I haven't seen 'em," said the other, dejectedly.

"Then come back with me. Why, you look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"Oh, no. I've only just been to take places for all my gees next month."

"What! Are you going to sell?"

"Yes. I hate hunting, I hate horses, I hate everything! I've resigned the mastership of the Foxshire hounds."

"George!" ejaculated his friend, opening his mouth, and unable to say more; "George!"

"It's quite true. I'm going to shoot somewhere—in Africa, or Afghanistan—or anywhere! I hate all the rot in this country!"

"Poor fellow!" said the other, as he sauntered into the fourteen-stall stable; "he seems quite bowled over. Been burning his fingers in the City, I suppose. What d——d fools these rich men are!"

Ten years ago he would have put it down to love; but in these days that is

only an episode in our lives. Money-making, or money-losing—there is the seriousness of the thing!

CHAPTER XV.

AT BRAYE LODGE.

"MY dear," said Hazelhatch, as the butler closed the door of the dining-room, "I wish you would not say these things before the servants."

Evelyn—whose face had lost much of its beauty—a loss that was not compensated for by the aid of art, which she had called in—gave him a look of withering scorn, which would have had more effect had he not endured so many similar looks of late.

"Yes, I daresay you *are* ashamed to let your servants see your treatment of me."

"I have nothing to be ashamed of."

"Nothing to be ashamed of!" she almost screamed, putting down her knife and fork. "You—a pauper—who only subsist on what I have—dare to tell me I have nothing to complain of!"

"If I am a pauper it is my misfortune, not my fault, and, after all, the accusation is not true. I certainly am not rich, but I have the same as you have, my dear Evelyn."

Her ladyship was the very picture of justifiable exasperation as she replied, stifling her rage and speaking very measuredly—

"Yes, because you tricked me into signing that rascally, swindling, atrocious deed, which gave all my money away to those creditors. I must have been mad to do it."

"No, dear. It was justice."

"Justice!" then her voice rose again, and again the knife and fork were laid down. "Justice to me—was it? Do you think I married you to be poor with you? Do you think I care for my father's 'reputation,' as you call it? There is only one thing left for me—married to you as I am, to think of—money. And you make me give it away."

"My dear Evelyn——"

"Don't call me your dear Evelyn. I hate you, I loathe and detest you. You are my turnkey, my keeper, and I feel towards you just as a prisoner generally feels towards a gaoler."

Injustice generally rouses a man after a time. Hazelhatch answered, not so calmly as before—

"That is nonsense—sheer unmitigated nonsense—you are welcome to go where you will."

"Thank you—you *are* kind. But it seems to me that the only move I am likely to make is to the workhouse."

"We owe no money now, and, if you prefer it, we can take a small house in London."

"Yes, lodgings in a dirty street off Belgravia, with a perpetual smell of mutton fat, and a landlady dunning for the rent every Saturday. That is just the position you would like for your wife."

"It needn't be as bad as that——"

"Bad as that! It would be twenty times worse. Do you think I care to rattle about in four-wheelers to the play now and then—when you can get orders from some of your theatrical acquaintances—or to draggle through the mud to the park to be cut by my friends?"

"Why?"

"Why! you are a greater fool than I

thought. Because my father is a swindler, and because we are paupers."

"The last is no reason—and I don't think the first is, either."

"It does not much matter," she said, with perfect feminine logic—the logic of changing the subject—"and I certainly don't mean to go and parade my poverty. If you could only have left the settlement alone——"

"Once for all," said Hazelhatch, who had just had a glass of sherry, "I will not discuss that any more. It was honest, and I chose to be honest."

"Be honest with your own money, then. What right had you to touch mine."

"The right of being your husband."

"My husband! Oh! I wish you were dead!"

He had heard this aspiration uttered so often of late that it had no effect upon

him, and he allowed it to pass with as little concern as he would a remark on the uncertainty of the weather. Scenes like that we have just described had become of daily, almost of hourly, occurrence at Braye Lodge lately. The hint thrown out by the doctor had been amply verified by observation. There had been mysterious illnesses—faintings and hysterics, mad fits of passion, succeeded by fearful hours of depression. Poor Hazelhatch had been driven to his wits' end. The reserve which prevented his actually remonstrating with his wife had not been broken through; but he had been obliged to take certain steps to curb the terrible craving that had taken possession of the poor woman, and she already suspected he had done so, and fiercely resented it. Strict rules as to alcoholic liquors, hitherto unknown in their well-regulated little establishment, had

lately been made; ostensibly for the benefit of the servants, but Evelyn was too shrewd, especially when this was concerned, to be deceived. The craving for stimulants had taken entire possession of her. Of course we associate such a feeling only with the hideous sot of the gin-palace, or the young man of fast habits, who sinks disreputably into an early and unhonoured grave; but, reader, before you condemn this veracious history for its want of *vraisemblance*, be good enough to go and ask any medical man of long practice what he thinks of the tippling which generally begins with "pick-me-ups," under the name of physic, and which is, sad to say, so largely on the increase, in what sensational writers call "the boudoir." It is to be feared that many a mysterious case of "nerves" would recur to his recollection to witness if we lie.

The dinner was got over—a time that was a daily penance to Hazelhatch, and they went to the drawing-room. He sat down to read the paper, and she to do nothing. So half an hour passed, with no sound but the crackling of the *Times* as he turned it.

"Are you never going to smoke to-night? I do wish you would, and you are so late."

"Time enough yet, dear."

"Time enough! There isn't. I hate seeing you sit there without speaking a word. It drives me mad."

"We'll talk, if you please," he said, laying down the paper.

"What have we got to talk about?"

"Then why shouldn't I read the news? Why can't you read a book, or work, or something?"

"That is so like you. You give me no

amusement; you condemn me to this prison life without a distraction, without a friend, and then you say, 'Why can't you work—or do something?'"

"What would you have me say?"

"Nothing—at least—I don't know. I only wish I had never seen you; I only wish you did not exist."

"Thank you."

"Yes, you may try to exasperate me with your calm manner. Oh, heaven, why was I ever born to endure this!"

A looker-on would have said that Hazelhatch was very hard-hearted to endure so calmly his wife's outburst of sighs and lamentations, but the looker-on might not have known that the same outburst occurred, in the same manner, about the same time every evening. Hazelhatch read his paper quietly for about ten minutes more. Then his wife said—

"*Will* you speak to me?"

"Certainly, dear. Did you read that article here about the mistake the Government made——"

"Oh, you are so clever, so political, quite a genius! It's a pity that you have never shown it except to me, who am easily impressed, you know. It's a pity that even your father says that you have no more idea of making a speech than squaring the circle. Of course you may be clever. It's my duty to think so. But it seems strange, with all your cleverness, you can't get anyone—except me, of course—to see it."

"I never said I was clever," said the poor man.

"Said so! No; but you've hinted it often enough."

"I have never done anything of the sort."

This time she wept silently.

"Oh, yes!—that's right. Tell me I am a liar; say anything you please to me. My father is in prison; Granville is going to be married; I have no one to take my part."

Hazelhatch jumped out of his chair, and the *Times* fell at his feet.

"I don't know what your object may be, Evelyn; but you certainly are trying to make my life unbearable. What Mr. Hereward has to do with the subject I don't see."

"I didn't think you would," she returned, with a cutting scorn, which should have been employed in a better cause. "I never did suppose you would understand what feelings meant. Stick to your hunting and litters of foxes and entries of hounds, and sentencing poachers to prison, that is more in your line."

"Evelyn," he began, very gravely, approaching her chair.

"Oh! you needn't put on those airs with me. I'm not afraid of you, as you know. I'm not afraid to tell you that I care more for his little finger than for twenty of you. Why can't you let me alone and go to the smoking-room?"

He looked at her flashing eyes and excited face for a moment, opened his lips as if to speak, and then turned away with a sigh and left the room. The moment the door had closed behind him, she sprang from the chair and hurried to a cupboard with glass doors, in which stood several pieces of old Chelsea china. Removing two of these she put her hand in, and a blank look of disappointment came across her face.

"Gone!"

On the other side of the room there was

a large porcelain vase, standing in an angle of the wall. Behind this she groped—"Nothing!"

In another moment she has flown downstairs and stands in Hazelhatch's room—or the smoking-room, as it is generally called—with fury in her eyes.

"Have you been meddling with my things?"

He would not pretend to misunderstand her.

"You mean the—you mean in the cupboard and behind the vase?"

"Yes. Have you touched them?"

"I have taken them away."

"And by what right?" she screamed—advancing upon him as he sat writing at his table—with her arms in the air.

"By every right. Evelyn, you are killing yourself."

"And if I am——"

"I will prevent you."

"You will!—you——!" Her eyes caught sight of a penknife lying on the table, and she snatched it up. "Give me back that bottle—it is the medicine the doctor ordered—it is the only cure for my neuralgia! I am in agony now! Give it me back, I say!"

"Evelyn, be calm. The servants will hear——"

"I will not be calm! Why shouldn't the servants hear? I don't care! They'll only know you are a thief, and steal my things; that you are cruel, and wish me to bear pain! Give it me back!"

"I cannot."

"You brute!" In her rage, without thinking what she did, she stabbed at him with the penknife she held, and started back, horrified for the moment, as the blood spurted from his neck.

He kept his presence of mind admirably.

"Sit down!" he said, putting his handkerchief to the wound with one hand, and with the other taking her by the arm.

The revulsion of feeling the sight of his blood had caused her passed away, and she struggled with him.

"Give it back—or I'll kill you!"

He held her firmly down on her chair, and took the penknife from her. Then she slipped from his grasp, threw herself down on the floor, and gave vent to piercing shrieks that re-echoed through the small house.

"He's hit me! He's killing me! Help! help! Will no one help me?"

"Silence, Evelyn!" said Hazelhatch, sternly. "Surely you do not wish the whole household to know of your shame—of your violence?"

"My shame! Help! help!"

"What is it, madame?" said Louise, the maid, opening the door. Behind her was the old butler, whom they had taken in when the Lortons went abroad, and who was scandalised by such doings.

But Evelyn, for all answer, only lay there and screamed for help.

"Shut the door, Jenkins; shut the door of the back-stairs, and go. And you, Louise, go upstairs. Your mistress is not well, and will go to bed at once. She is hysterical."

"*Pauvre homme!*" said Louise, to Mr. Jenkins, outside the door. "'Ow can he bear milady?"

"Married out of 'is class, mademoiselle," said Mr. Jenkins, sadly. "That never answers. I always said it 'd come to something like this."

"But do they—the ozer class—always drink cognac too much, Mr. Jenkins?"

"Always," replied the butler; and they parted on the stairs.

In the meantime the fit of hysterics passed off, and Evelyn suffered herself to be placed in a chair; while her husband, after applying some sticking-plaister to the cut in his neck, tried to go on with the letter he had been writing when she burst in upon him. But it was not easy to keep his thoughts fixed upon it while she sat silent there, occasionally sobbing. For some time the silence was broken only by these sobs, and by the scratching of his pen upon the paper; and then the butler, with an air of thinking nothing in the least extraordinary had occurred, came in with the tray, on which was water and soda-water, and proceeded to open the cellaret, Hazelhatch being accustomed to drink one

glass of soda-water and brandy before going to bed.

Evelyn never stirred, and he went on writing.

All of a sudden a movement on her part caused him to look up, and he was just in time to see her with her lips to one of the bottles from the cellaret. As she became aware that he saw, she put it down, and, with a defiant laugh, rose and left the room.

He resumed his letter:—"Tell me at once, my dear mother, if there is any suspicion of danger in my father's illness. I do not mind how many journeys to Brussels I may have to take. He is an old man, and our last words were scarcely friendly. Try to make him feel comfortable about me by telling him that we are getting on very well—and that I am happy."

Then he rang the bell.

"Jenkins, I want to say—— Stay—bring Louise here."

The butler returned with that damsel.

"Louise, her ladyship has gone upstairs. You had better follow; but before you go I want to ask you, have you obeyed me exactly?"

"Yes, milor."

"None of—of it—is hidden away anywhere?"

"I have searched every place. No, there is none."

"And you will, as a favour to me, speak to no one—to none of the other servants, or at any future time to anyone—of this?"

He winced as he spoke. The degradation seemed so complete.

"Never, milor. Will you believe, milor——"

"That will do. Now go upstairs.

Jenkins, are you keeping that watch over the things that come in? I am inclined to trust the girl, but one cannot be sure."

"Yes, my lord. But—you see——"

"Well?"

"Well, her ladyship drove out the day before yesterday, and John told me——"

"John!" Even the groom must know! The poor lord groaned.

"He told me that her ladyship bought some at the grocer's in Foxborough, and brought it home."

Hazelhatch thought for a moment, and then dismissed the man. It was a strange, horrible struggle that he had embarked in. But, at any rate, he would do his utmost to save her.

Why was it that, in his darkest moments of despair, the image of Ella came before him, and seemed to nerve him to continue the conflict—and came before him not to

tell him of his cast-away happiness, but to show him that there was a brightness still left in the world that seemed so gloomy to him?

CHAPTER XVI.

A BLACK NIGHT.

YES, a black night. Soft rain falling, and wetting the plumage of the pheasants in their comfortable roosting places; keeping the rabbits in a little later than usual; and causing the foxes, out for their nightly rounds in search of provender, to shake the drip off their darkened coats. A black night. A night to be remembered long in the annals of Braye House; or rather, perhaps, a night to be expunged—if that were only possible—from the family records. A black night. Black in the haunts of crime in busy London; black

with unutterable sadness in many a chamber of sickness unto death; black to the eye-straining skipper as he ploughs his way up or down Channel with the fear of collision ever before him, and far-off steam-whistles sounding in his bewildered ears; black to many a despairing wretch tossing on the wakeful bed of misery; but black as anywhere in the chamber of Evelyn, Lady Hazelhatch. She has awoke, and there is but one thought in her mind. Cautiously she rises, cautiously she crosses the room, lit only by the flickering night-light. Cautiously she opens a cupboard; nothing! Another and yet another hiding-place is ransacked, still with the same result. For a moment she stands irresolute, a strange figure in the uncertain light, and then, throwing on a dressing-gown, she gently turns the handle of the door and steals downstairs.

"Louise!"

There is no answer. The maid, dreaming of her future home with François in beloved Paris, sleeps sound.

"Louise! Louise!"

"*Comment!* Who is it? Milady!"

"Yes. What have you done with—where have you put the bottles? in my room?"

"I know not, milady."

"You lie—you do know," says Evelyn, in a hoarse whisper. "Where are they?"

"Milor has taken them away."

A gesture of impotent fury from her mistress.

"Can I do anything for milady."

"Yes; find them."

"I cannot; everything is locked up."

Evelyn pressed her trembling hands together with a passionate fierceness.

"Where does Jenkins sleep?"

"Mr. Jenkins? By the pantry, milady. But—but you would not go there! It is no use."

"No use! Do you think my servants will dare to disobey me?" and she passed on to knock at the butler's door.

"Get up at once, Jenkins, and bring to the dining-room a bottle of brandy. I am ill, and I do not wish to disturb his lordship. At once, Jenkins!"

There was a slight delay, and Jenkins opened the door. He was in a hastily-extemporised costume, and his grey hair stood on end.

"I beg your pardon, my lady."

"At once! Do you hear me?" and she stamped her slippered foot on the floor.

"His lordship has the key of the cellaret."

"The cellar, then."

"He has the key of that, too."

This was not precisely the case, but Mr. Jenkins thought his master was better able than himself to bear the brunt of the lady's anger.

She hesitated a moment. Then—

"You can go back to bed, Jenkins. I will speak to his lordship."

But no word did she say to him when she got back into her room. Without striking a light, and with wonderful celerity and silence, she proceeded to dress herself, putting on last a hat and cloak.

Then, with a stealthy look around her, she descended the staircase. How it creaked, and moaned, and groaned, as if knowing what was going forward, and anxious to prevent it. But all the moaning and creaking was in vain. The household slept quietly on, and she, after a slight difficulty with the door-fastenings, stood

outside the house. Then she laughed. A laugh not pleasant to hear—a laugh in which there was a ring of madness. And she was mad—mad for drink, like any poor wretch in the streets, flying to the gin-shop with her last sixpence. The mania for alcohol had seized upon her with all its strength, and to-night, for one glass of brandy, she would have faced anything. That was her one idea—brandy!—at all hazard, brandy. The public-house in Braye village would be closed, no doubt, but she could ring the bell. She could say there was a servant suddenly taken ill at the Lodge, and there happened to be no brandy. She could easily account for her coming. They would be pleased at such a sign of her kindness; but, let them be pleased or not, the brandy she must have. Oh, how she hated the husband who was causing her all this pain—who denied her the

only thing her soul loved! As she almost ran along the park, many thoughts crowded into her brain, but one predominated—she was about to drink. Once at the village her shaking hand would be firm and steady, her wild fancies would die. The terror of a coming terror, a vague mysterious fear of nothing, but intense fear nevertheless, would fade away.

She reached a part of the road where a path branched off. The short cut to the village, but scarcely a good way to take on a night like this, when you scarce could see your hand before your face. For some hundred yards it ran along the edge of the quarry. The old timber-fence had just been removed, and the new one not yet put up. No, she would go on by the road. It was not much longer. How the rain fell upon her defenceless form!

She had forgotten to bring an umbrella. Her shoes were those she had worn in the evening, and were at once soaked through. Occasionally a rabbit darting almost from beneath her feet, or an alarmed pheasant rustling from its perch, caused her heart almost to stand still with fear. Then she peopled the dark night with shadowy forms, pursuing her, mocking at her, calling to her to stop, threatening her; withholding the glass full—full to the brim with the delicious, care-destroying beverage—from her parched lips. On! On! What was that behind her? Surely something almost touched her shoulder! and that dark form in front, must she pass it? Courage! The village was close now—only round the corner of the road. Yes, here was the Lodge. The side-gate was open, and had it not been she could have climbed over. Up the deserted village street, not a light

—not a sound. Her footsteps seemed to echo back from the dark cottages, and a horrible idea seized her that suddenly the windows would be full of faces mocking at her, and calling to her to desist.

On, on! Yes, there it was. The "Braye Arms" sign creaked slowly before the door, and the rain fell persistently into the mud which had been stirred up by the boots of the overnight revellers.

She rang, and then waited; then again louder; again. Then she threw some small stones against the first-floor windows. At last movements inside could be heard; a window was thrown up, and a voice demanded, "Who is it?"

"I—Lady Hazelhatch! A servant taken suddenly ill, and no brandy in the house. I have driven down to get it. Be quick, please, and give me a bottle!"

"Beg pardon, my lady," said the voice,

and the window shut. In a few moments the old publican—of course an old servant of the family—appeared at the door, full of apologies for his attire, and bearing in his hand the bottle of brandy. "I'm sure, my lady, it is really—won't you let me send it?—so good of your ladyship, at this hour of the night—if your ladyship——"

She cut short the old man's bewildered remarks, and turned away, saying,

"My carriage is just inside the Lodge, thank you, Mr. Belters. Good night."

She had it at last—oh, blessed moment! Would the old fool never close the door, so that she might take advantage of it? At last! Ha! She was another woman now. Let them try to keep it from her! Nothing should do so. It was life—it was the breath of her nostrils! Another hour without it and she would have died.

And as she hurried homewards she thought of a hundred places where she might hide her prize safely, and devised schemes for providing herself with more. She had courage now; there could be no danger in going by the short cut; and she turned sharp to the right after passing through the lodge gate. How dark it was! Yes, this was the wicket that led into the Home Wood—here was the path. She had only to keep on the inside and there was no danger—no danger at all; there could be no danger in anything if she only had enough to drink. Nothing was terrible except that mysterious awe that had seized her that night when she woke and failed to find the bottle.

No danger! What is it that wakens the echoes of the wood, and sends the unsuspicious game scurrying right and left? A woman's scream. What are the

sounds which seem to mingle with the plashing of the rain upon the leaves? A woman's groans. She has fallen down the quarry. But the bottle is safe; she held it high in the air as she fell, and it is unbroken. But she cannot move; her legs seemed paralysed, and the agony is fearful. The cold sweat stands on her brow. Is it death? She tries to pray, but no words will come. It seems hard to die—to die while others are happy—and in such torture. Stay! She has comfort there. Surely the brandy will kill the pain. At any rate, it will arrest the faintness which she feels is coming on, and which may prevent her calling the attention of a passer-by. Yes, now it is better. A little more? Why not? If she is dying what does it matter? A little more? Why, the brandy is nearly finished! Better leave none; it may keep her alive, and

already the pain has gone—all feeling is going. Where is she? Is it death?—is it death?

CHAPTER XVII.

NEXT MORNING.

GRADUALLY the morning broke. The sun rose and gladdened the hearts of the birds, who, weary with the long darkness, broke into songs of delight. The rain ceased, and every creature in the woods came forth to revel in the pleasure of a new day. Down in the old quarry the pheasants sought, and no doubt found, the early and foolish worm of tradition; and there, also, where the moss had grown over many a uselessly-blasted bit of rock, the rabbits played to and fro, just as if they were not the keepers' "perquisites," and as if there

were no such things as traps in the world. There was an unaccustomed object lying there amid the moss-covered rocks, from which, at first, they all sedulously kept. But, as it never stirred, at last an old and courageous rabbit approached nearer —nearer still. It had certainly the likeness of the rabbit's natural enemy, but it stirred not. And the rabbit went close up to it. Another followed. A wary hen pheasant approached; then another. And after a time they went about their various amusements of food or fun around it, as if it were but another piece of rock hewn from the quarry.

And in very truth it was no more than that; only dust—inanimate, useless dust. But fair indeed were those cold, set features; soft and beautiful were the masses of soft fair hair lying dishevelled about the little recumbent head; not unlovely even

the wide-open eyes, staring right up to the sky. A woman! "One that was a woman," as the grave-digger would have it. Evelyn, Lady Hazelhatch. And her husband lies at home and dreams, maybe, of the happy days before all this misery had come upon them—of the days when he loved her, and believed that she loved him. And the broken-hearted, grey-haired man in the prison toils at his hard labour, and looks forward tremblingly to the time when he may go forth—into obscurity, certainly, but still free—and see again the proud, beautiful face which, save money, was the only thing he had loved on earth, while Evelyn lies here dead and cold, with an empty bottle firmly grasped in her white fingers.

Steps are heard approaching, the game scuttles away, two or three pheasants noisily taking to their wings, and the body, which seemed less awful for their innocent

companionship, lies there alone in the sunshine.

"William," says Mr. Graines, who is given to early rising, "we must begin marking those oak-trees at once. I think his lordship is sure to want them cut this season."

"Bark is selling dreadful cheap, sir," expostulates the old forester.

"It can't be helped," replies the agent, with some irritation, fingering in his pocket a letter received over-night from Brussels, containing an urgent request for money.

"And such fine young trees, too!"

"It can't be helped, I tell you. Hullo! what on earth is that?"

"Why—surely—it's——"

Not another word. In a few moments they have scrambled down to the bottom of the quarry, and are standing beside what was the night before a living woman.

"Dead!"

"Look here, sir," said the forester, pointing to the bottle.

Mr. Graines with difficulty loosened the grasp of the stiffened fingers.

"Take it, William—put it away—anywhere—in your pocket. Never say a word about it! Poor lady!—poor lady! Never a word about the bottle, William!"

"Never, sir. Whatever will his lordship do?"

"It is the will of God! It is the will of God!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN BRUSSELS.

LORD LORTON sat in the little park of Brussels, smoking his cigar and reading the newspaper. He was dressed in a suit of alpaca which looked in the sun like sticking-plaister; and, although perhaps a trifle aged since we last met him, he seemed the picture of contentment and comfort.

"One gets accustomed to everything," he is wont to say. "I declare I shall soon appreciate Belgian tobacco; and living *en pension*—that is, being tied down to have no more than a certain appetite

each day—becomes quite agreeable after a time. Wrangling about centimes, too, is not a bad occupation when you have little else to do; and an occasional drive in a fiacre at the rate of about three miles an hour is, when you consider the principle of the thing, just as good as driving on a coach in Hyde Park. Then there is so much amusement to be got out of the English society here; I mean the *shady* part of it. Their desperate attempts to show you that shadiness, either of character or pocket, is *not* the reason of their expatriation. I daresay they say the same of me, and think I have robbed a church. That dear creature, Arthur Arevell, who had the little difficulty about an extra king or two at *écarté*, told me yesterday that his reason for living here was that the climate of Brussels was positively the only one that his wife could live in."

"Do you think it right to speak to and be seen with that man?" a friend asked him one day, when he had told this story.

"My dear fellow," said Lord Lorton, putting his hand on the other's arm—"my dear fellow, I never had the chance of meeting a detected card-sharper before; I daresay I know heaps of undetected ones," he added, reflectively. "It's a pity one has so little pluck. If I had taken to cheating at cards—and I daresay, with a few lessons from a conjurer, I should have done it as well as my friends—I probably shouldn't be living *en pension* here now. But it would have been a good deal of trouble, I daresay. Success is not always so enviable as one supposes."

He had a serious way of saying things of this kind which often shocked people—literal people. Naturally and rigorously the most honourable and honest of men,

his ethics were of a kind to make the hair of the pious to stand on end. To listen to his wild theories was a never-ending, half terrible excitement to his wife, who apparently thrived on the hotel diet; for she had become a mountain of flesh.

She was seated beside him this morning in the park, doing her work and listening to her liege lord's conversation, and the bits of news he read from the fashionable gazette which he held in his hand.

"Hullo! Marriage in High Life. This will interest you, my dear. Good heavens, what a paper this is! The very reading it makes me feel like a gentleman, gentleman! so horribly elegant, and genteel, and full of *bon ton;* a swell; one of the 'upper ten;' in the *beau monde;* in ''igh life.' Bah!"

"Well, dear, what's the marriage?" said her ladyship.

"I'll read it all to you. Here's Jacquemont, my dear; bow to him."

She obeyed his command, and inclined her head in response to the gentleman's effusive salute.

"I really don't see why I should bow to a bootmaker."

"Not to *a* bootmaker; not to a bootmaker *quâ* bootmaker; but to *my* bootmaker, certainly. A man to whom you owe money is more than an acquaintance; he becomes a friend; unless, indeed," added he, rather sadly, "he becomes an enemy."

"But what's the marriage?"

"Here goes. 'On Tuesday last was solemnized the marriage between the Lady Theodora Emilia Gretwoode Maryland, only daughter and heiress of the late Marquis of Virginia and Granville, K.G., Hereward, Esq., of Hereward Heath, Dorsetshire.

"'At an early hour the neighbourhood of the fashionable church near Hanover Square was astir, and shortly after eleven o'clock the crush of carriages conveying all the *élite* of the *beau monde* was immense. The bridegroom, attended by his best man, His Effulgent Highness the Crown Prince of Bulmelia, arrived in good time; and His Effulgency shook hands heartily with many of the aristocracy collected within the church. In a short time the bride appeared, and was met at the door of the church by the bridegroom, and by her bridesmaids.'

"I'll leave out the dresses, my dear—you can read 'em to yourself afterwards. Let's see—— Ha! this is rather good, and throws a doubt upon the genuineness of the whole affair.

"'Lady Theodora's beauty was the cynosure of all eyes; and the modest yet

firm manner in which she repeated the responses was admired by all.

"'The ceremony was performed by His Grace the Bishop of South Wales, assisted by the Rev. Lord George Headlam (cousin of the bride) and the Rev. Arthur Tomkins, rector of the parish in which Mr. Hereward's magnificent country seat is situated. The bride was given away by her maternal uncle, the Earl of Holyhead and Kingstown, whose magnificent present of diamonds we noticed last week. At the breakfast, which was given at the bride's mansion in Portman Square, we noticed——' You can read that to yourself too, Mary.—'Amid a shower of old shoes, and the customary sprinkling of rice, the happy pair whirled away in an open carriage and four to Paddington, whence they proceeded in a special train to Gadstrode, which has been placed at

their disposal by the Duke and Duchess of Tedcastle.

"'All over Lady Theodora Hereward's numerous estates great rejoicings were held, and there was also a magnificent dinner and ball to the tenants and *employés* on Mr. Hereward's Dorsetshire property.

"'We forgot to mention, in our last week's number of the presents, that His Royal Highness the Prince of —— sent the bridegroom, who is an esteemed friend of His Royal Highness's, a *cadeau* consisting of a magnificent aluminium pencil-case.'"

Lord Lorton laid down the paper, which his wife immediately pounced upon, and indulged in a long silent fit of internal laughter.

"Don't, Lorton; you'll have a fit of apoplexy."

"Verdict, 'Died of laughing at British snobbery.' Mind you put that on the stone if I do. The son of the old money-lender, Hart! Dear, dear! with an effulgent best man, and the biggest heiress in the kingdom. Laugh!—if I didn't laugh at that, I should never laugh again."

"This is an age of progress, Lorton. The old landmarks——"

"Don't, my dear—don't crush me with repetitions of my own foolish speeches. Progress!—yes, I sit here and smoke a two sous cigar, and Ben Hart's son marries himself into being considered a gentleman."

"It must have been a grand wedding, Lorton."

"The most splendid practical joke of this or any other age. By the way, have

you heard lately from anyone in the old county? By Jove! how I should like to be back there!"

"Yes; I heard the other day from Miss Newsbury."

"The old cat!"

"She says Ella has taken up her permanent abode with the Manistys at Coalbridge, and is hopefully awaiting Mrs. Manisty's demise, so that she may marry the rector."

"Spiteful old—female dog!"

"And she goes on to say that Bob Manisty is generally supposed to contemplate self-destruction in consequence of unrequited love. She also hints that George has been trying again."

"Ha! I wish she would have him. He's rather a fool, but I think a fool is the best husband, after all, and he's devoted to her."

"I had thought, Lorton, that perhaps——"

"Perhaps what, conspirator?" asked he, smiling as he observed her arch look.

"Perhaps that, when dear Harry gets over his loss, in time he might—— You see, it would be some sort of reparation for our having been so cruel to her."

"Would it? I don't see that. Harry is not half good enough for her. A man who could throw aside such a girl as that to marry a vulgar woman because she is an heiress——"

"Why, Lorton, it was all your own arrangement!" exclaimed the old lady, aghast.

"What *has* that to do with it? He had no business to give in. I'm sure, if my father had ordered me to marry anyone but you, Mary—— By Jove! what a slim slip of a girl you were!"

"Ah!" sighed her ladyship, sadly.

"I say, if my father had ordered me, I'd have told him to go to the devil."

"But we wanted money so badly."

"Yes, and a heap of good it has done us," said he, with characteristic inconsistency. "We have the satisfaction of being closely connected with a gentleman walking, with short hair, on the treadmill, and of being also closely connected with a celebrated and not over agreeable 'tragedy,' as the papers called it."

"Why—you don't believe——"

"Believe! It's pretty clear to me that the unfortunate woman went out that night to buy drink; and died of it, after falling over the quarry. Of course it was quite right to hush it all up as much as possible; and the way that old sinner, Belters, was made to contradict himself was capital. Still you don't suppose many

people—sensible people—were blinded."

"Oh, Lorton!"

"Well—let's change the subject. When do you expect Harry?"

"Probably, he will come to-day. I wonder whether all this travelling has done him any good. I never saw anyone so ill and wretched as he was when he started."

"Poor boy! He had a lot of worry, certainly. And I hate his coming back to more. It certainly would be a pity if he came in time for the meeting of creditors to-morrow."

She started. "Is that to be, Lorton—oh, can't you put it off?"

"*I* could, with pleasure. But *they* won't. You see there are all sorts of unpleasant laws as to imprisonment here. It's enough to have one of the family in prison at a time. More respectable. No. I shall just tell them how the case stands. If they wait a

little, they will be paid. If they won't wait—well, then they would probably be paid too—but it is my business to prevent their seeing the matter in that light."

"And you can sit there and smoke!"

"Would my walking about not smoking do any good? There's one of them, Grancourt, the tailor. What a smart wife he has! Bow, Mary. Bow low—his bill is about the biggest. There!—he smiled. That means his accepting my terms. Couldn't you get up and say something to her? Tell him his wife is splendid, or something of that sort."

But the tailor and his grand wife passed on, and the opportunity was lost.

At this moment there approached a tall young man, bronzed with hot suns and exposure; broad-shouldered, fair-bearded, a pleasant example of the Englishman.

He was looking round as if seeking some one.

"Harry!"

"Mother!"

And, regardless of lookers on, he was locked in his mother's arms.

"My boy," said Lorton, clearing his throat, and with something very like moisture in his eye. "My boy—I am glad to see you. You look magnificent. I like you in a beard extremely well—have you shot much big game?"

"No—we had but little luck," said Hazelhatch, still holding his mother's hands. "But we did get a few lions. You are looking well, father."

"Well enough, my boy, well enough. It don't do for an old man, any more than for an old hunter, to be too sound. We ought to be like the celebrated one-horse shay, and go all together. But here, I

am still keeping you out of your inheritance."

"I hope you will do that for many a long year."

"Well, it is not much when you get it," said the old man, cheerfully, "and that makes it more satisfactory. I don't think I could have the conscience to go on living if I was keeping you from a large fortune, which I am too old to enjoy. But, my boy, it's *table d'hôte* time. Give your arm to your mother, my boy; though as active as a kitten, she somehow gets over the ground better with assistance. *Allons! Marchons!*"

And the party thus made their way back to the hotel. As they went along Hazelhatch remarked that his father had grown very feeble, and that in reality it was he, rather than his wife—for all her obesity—who required his assistance. He had

been away for a year, and a year makes a great difference to a man who has begun the descent of the hill.

Over their coffee on the balcony of the hotel the father told the son many things that afternoon. He put off the meeting of creditors' news to the last, and, when he told it, of course Hazelhatch was very much perturbed.

"Couldn't you have kept out of debt?"

"Well," said Lord Lorton, reflectively, watching his smoke forming wreaths in the air, "I don't think I could; I've been trying to do that same all my life, and have miserably failed. I expect that it has grown into a habit now. When I try to turn over a new leaf, it's only a new leaf in a tradesman's book. But you will at least admit, Harry, that the fact of my having been able to get into debt in this suspicious place is a strong evidence of

respectability. Why, the very title 'Comte' here is expressive of a desire to bolt in the dead of night."

"At any rate, I see no necessity for the arrangement you contemplate; I should think I could, with you, easily raise money enough to pay off all."

"No, no; I'm not to make you any poorer because of my extravagance. Besides, I have no doubt of being able to persuade them to accept my terms; their charges are very high, and they will get all their money in time. Let us consider that subject finished. There is one other subject I wanted to speak to you about. When I die, you will not be as poor as you think; you know the Braye estate property —not much, but still a nice little property —was entailed. Of course my life interest has gone, but I could sell no more—luckily for you. Now I happened to ascertain the

other day that I might tumble down dead at any moment, and so I thought I might as well just give you a few final hints and suggestions."

"Drop down dead any minute!"

"Yes; heart it is. Don't tell your mother; it would make her unhappy, and probably worry me into dropping sooner than I otherwise should—any excitement would do it, and so I am carefully keeping from excitement."

"My dear father—what doctor——"

"Oh, I saw two or three—the best men here, and Sir Andrew Cooker, who happened to pass through the other day; he confirmed what the others said, and asked me if I had made my will. I haven't; I hate wills. Instead, I want to tell you all I wish done. Of course your mother has her portion; luckily, I couldn't touch that; and your sister is provided for. What a

snob that husband of hers is, by the way! Now what do you say about Ella?"

"What about her?" asked Hazelhatch, surprised.

"She's uncommon hard up; the old madman saved nothing. By-the-by, there is a letter for you in her handwriting; you'll get it when we go upstairs. Don't you think she might be helped? You see, we—that is, your mother and I—and you too, perhaps, didn't behave so very well to the poor girl. Fancy her having been 'companion' to that stuck-up little donkey of an heiress!"

"I scarcely think anything could be done there," said the son, looking very grave, and longing to go upstairs to get his letter.

"Well, perhaps you are right; she's a proud little thing—devilish proud! I like proud women. Pride is the only thing

that keeps 'em straight, after all. That's what they ought to inculcate from the pulpit. I defy a proud woman to—but I see you are in a hurry, and I won't twaddle on. Mind you say nothing to your mother about my—my health."

"I can scarcely believe—I must hope it is not true."

"My dear boy, don't think of believing it, if it would worry you to do so. I never believe unpleasant things if I can help it. This I don't so much mind. I shouldn't like to decay bit by bit like old Evergreen, who, I am told, is getting blue mould all over him like the pies we used to save up at school."

They went upstairs, and soon Hazelhatch escaped to read his letters. First, of course, he read Ella's; the sight of her handwriting, once so familiar and so dear, made his heart beat.

It was a kind, sympathetic, womanly letter, written when she thought he could bear to have his great sorrow touched upon by others.

"Will you remember the words I said to you by the Serpentine that day? How little either of us then thought of the dreadful event that was so near. Do not be bitter; do not think you have not much of happiness in store for you. At any rate, you have clear duties and responsibilities. Lord Lorton is growing old, and he is so fond of you. Poor Evelyn! It is terrible to think of, but let us trust—we may trust—that she is happy now. I am living now with the Manistys, who are kindness itself. You remember Bob?—he is quite a big man now, in a cavalry regiment, with a moustache. Now for my bit of news. The duchess called upon me—yes, upon *me!* She especially gave out that

this was the case, which made the Manisty girls rather angry; and she made all sorts of queer apologies, and alluded so mysteriously to all kinds of extraordinary and incomprehensible things that I was very glad when she had gone. She kissed me at parting. Fancy a kiss from the Duchess of Ross-shire! There is a rumour in the county that dear George Newsbury is going to take a wife to Averley at last. Such a nice girl—if—the rumour is true. Jane Markby—the fair one with the pretty blue eyes. Just the wife for him. She knows all the hounds' names now, and rides almost as well as—— Who shall I say? *I* don't mean to hunt any more, although the dear rector is very anxious to get me a horse. But all the horse-flesh he can afford will be wanted for Bob, who is thirsting to wear his first red-coat. Is there any truth in the report of your

having been in danger in Africa? Lady Lorton has promised to let me have your wild adventures at second-hand when you have told them to her. I wonder whether I am doing wrong in writing to you? I cannot think so; for we are to be, are we not, what she said the last time we met—friends? And I shall sign myself your affectionate friend,

"ELLA BANNERBURN."

The other letter we have mentioned was from George Newsbury, giving, in rather a shame-faced way, the news of his engagement.

"You see Ella wouldn't have me—and—and—I got lonely; and Jennie is such a dear little thing; and so fond of hunting, and of me. I went over to Coalbridge the other day—Ella is looking perfectly lovely; and I can't help thinking there is some-

thing between her and that son of old Manisty's. He seems never to leave her; and when I drove away they started for a walk in Castle Dorington Park. I suppose you have heard that the owner thereof, Captain Bannerburn, has left the Army, and gone to live in Paris. I fancy he was a nasty kind of chap—never hunted or shot, or did anything but sing and play the piano, and talk foreign languages. A man who ought to be debarred by law from owning an estate in a sporting county. They say he writes poetry too; and I believe he has killed foxes while in Foxshire; though I can't quite prove it. I wish you'd come to Braye, old chap. Old Griffiths is playing the deuce about the coverts, and——" then followed a long disquisition on the necessity for quietness in woods and gorses to ensure the presence of foxes, which we need not inflict on our readers.

Before he went to bed that night Hazelhatch answered one of these letters.

"My post is at my father's side, dear Ella, as you say. He is very far from well; and he is an old man. I wish I had thought more of him all these years. Probably most sons have felt the same. We will be, as you say, always friends; and I need scarcely tell you how gladly I receive any tidings of you which promise your being happy, as you deserve to be, and having some one to love and protect you as you deserve to be loved and protected."

Ella was much puzzled by this sentence, and read it over several times, quite failing to seize its meaning even when Bob, a young giant, with shy manners and a military appearance, came into the room and pleaded for a stroll. Ella treated him now much as she had always done. It

seemed so natural that he should adore her and be her slave, and it never occurred to her that he had developed into a marriageable young man. Marriageable in two senses, too; for a kind aunt, sister of his mother, had left him a nice little fortune.

Poor Bob never knew what to make of her kind familiarity; but he had generally enough shrewdness not to presume too much upon it. Were he to hear that awful word he sometimes dreamed of from her lips, he felt that never again would he be able to don his gay uniform, to smoke the after-dinner cigar with his cheery companions of the ante-room, or to inspect his troop on parade.

Nothing would be left for him then but to shun for ever soldiering, smoking, and society. And, seeking courage by clutching at his moustache, he walked by her

side through the summer days, and listened to her unrestrained conversation, and knew the beauty of her mind, and was maddened by the charm of her smiles, and fell so deeply in love that it would have seemed a hopeless task for all the horses in his regiment to attempt to pull him out again.

CHAPTER XIX.

LAND AHEAD!

THERE is something touching in the ingenuous modesty of the old writer, who, fearful that he has been long-winded, cheers up his patient readers with the exclamation, "Courage, friends! I see land!" In truth it is, we imagine, with mixed feelings that the novelist nears the end of his task; when the time has come to put away the puppets that have, for the time, to him at least, been endowed with vitality, and to let drop the curtain on his little stage. Whether they—the puppets—have pleased or not he has no notion. What

has seemed to him exhilarating in his tale, may have been the dullest portion to the reader; what to him has been dull may have given pleasure. No one is a worse judge than he. The book goes out into the cruel world of reviewers, and he feels somewhat as a fond mother who first sends her darling son into the unknown terrors of a public school. There will be a good deal of rough and ready justice, tempered by very little mercy. In the end his meaning, perhaps, may be appreciated by a few. The sneers of unappreciative ones—perhaps with books of their own, for which room and breathing space is required—will cease to hurt; the butterman will receive his due supply of paper, and the puppets will be pulled to pieces, and dressed up again for another show. A still sweeter grin will be painted on the heroine's face, smarter clothes and pinker cheeks will

adorn another hero, and the villain will have to be depicted with a scowl more malicious yet. Then, hey presto! Ring up on the new comedy. Sharpen your pens anew, critics! Send to your libraries, oh! gentle novel readers; and put your hands in your pockets, oh! noble army of publishers!

The end of our tale is approaching. Land is right ahead. There only remains to get through the surf—and that surf of finishing, of collecting the scattered interests, is none so easy to surmount—and we are in harbour.

* * * * * *

In this world people will die. That is a fact which there is no gainsaying, and therefore we can hardly bring ourselves to apologize for introducing into this story yet another death. We should have liked to keep old Lord Lorton, with his kind

heart, his transparent cynicism, and his surface selfishness, alive much longer, but, alas! we cannot. Even with a system like his it was impossible to withstand the insidious disease that had attacked him, and one morning they found him lying, as if asleep, and smiling, in his bed, cold and dead.

Lady Lorton's grief was loud and sincere, and Hazelhatch's scarcely less so. Although you could scarcely respect the old gentleman, it was impossible not to like him. Above all things, he was a gentleman, and gentlemen are not so common as may be supposed. The very creditors at Brussels, who had lost by him, and whom he had only known for some twelve months, were affected at hearing of his death; and Lady Lorton was much astonished at the few claims that were sent in to her after that occurrence. Besides the tradesmen's

kindly feelings, however, perhaps a series of visits paid them by Hazelhatch, in company with Mr. Graines—who had been sent for—had something to do with this phenomenon.

"Bury me where I die. I want no nonsensical expense incurred in moving my body, and I have no wish to sleep with my ancestors. I never knew any of them save my father, and I remember he snored," was in a letter found in his desk, directed to his son; and they obeyed him, and laid him in the pretty Protestant Cemetery of the Belgian Capital.

Lady Violet was engaged in the interesting occupation of presenting her husband with a baby, and therefore could not come. So the group that followed the coffin was a small one; and there were but few there to see the last of the man who had once been the most brilliant of a brilliant London

set, who had thrown money about like water, and, while securing a friend in every acquaintance, had never had an enemy save himself.

"I see old Lorty's gone at last," they said at the clubs. "He must have been a great age. Quite smashed, too, poor old chap. Time he did go. Do you dine here?"

There were anecdotes of him in the weekly papers, some more apocryphal than good-natured, and one radical writer made great capital out of his death.

"An exile and in poverty, he dies a warning to an immoral, useless, and spendthrift aristocracy."

Useless, poor man, he had indeed been; but, after all, that is a shade better than doing harm in your generation; and what harm may so-called useful men do!

Then Henry, now Lord Lorton, having

made arrangements with his mother as to her living in a small house to be rented by her in London, and having refused to accept any part of the jointure left her—and she was desirous of giving up one half—began to look into his affairs as they now stood, and to consider whether he should not be justified in once more living in the old place in Foxshire.

"With economy you can do it, my lord, and do it easily," said Mr. Graines. "Yes, and have your amusements too."

"I don't want any amusements, Mr. Graines."

"Wait a bit," said that sagacious gentleman. "I never knew a young man who didn't want amusement."

"But all alone at Braye—and my mother has taken a dislike to the place—I should go mad with loneliness."

"Should you?" and the agent, who

esteemed himself a cunning man, smiled archly. "Come and try."

"I'll think it over. At any rate I must just go there with you to put things straight."

Yes, he would just go there on business —solely on business; and, as he said this to himself, his heart, by its beating, told him he was lying. Does one's heart beat at the anticipation of going through a dilapidated and diminished rent-roll?

CHAPTER XX.

AT LAST.

BREAKFAST was a pleasant meal at Coalbridge Rectory. The master of the house, who had been up for hours, had broken the neck of his day's writing, and felt content; Mrs. Manisty was always good-natured; the girls had not yet been asked to face any of the worries and petty annoyances, principally imaginary, of their daily existence, and the mere sight of Ella's sweet face, with its gentle smiles and innocent raillery, was in itself a delight. Even Lieutenant Bob, of the 100th Dragoons, took to rising in time,

and, secretly despising himself the while, fetched and carried for her as if he had been one of her father's curates. He drew a distinct line, however, and changed no plate for one of his own family—not he!

Let us listen for a few moments to the conversation at this meal, about a year after the death of Lord Lorton. The present peer had paid a hasty visit to Braye soon after that event, in company with Mr. Graines, and had found time, before departing to join his mother in London, to ride over once to Coalbridge. On that occasion Ella was, as Mrs. Manisty told him, out in Castle Dorington Park with her son Bob.

"She is always with him now," added the old lady, who rather liked the idea of "the Honourable Ella" (who had been called upon by the duchess in so "particular" a manner) as a daughter-in-law.

And then Hazelhatch had departed abruptly, and had been no more heard of.

"Another cup of tea," says the rector, beaming on his wife. "Not husband's tea —I shall rebel—the same as you give Bob. A parson is as good as a dragoon any day."

"Particularly a dismounted dragoon," put in Ella, mischievously. Poor Bob had been kicked off a young horse under her very nose only the day before.

"You mustn't let your brother officers know about—about yesterday—when you go back; must you, Bob?"

"No fellow could have sat the mare. She wriggled from under me," said the dragoon, with sulky embarrassment.

"But you needn't mind, my dear boy. You are only proving the truth of the old saying that cavalry soldiers never can ride."

"Can't they? You should see Smivens —Pucky Smivens of ours. Can't he ride! Why, he'd give George Newsbury, or your wonderful Hazelhatch, two stone and a beating any day."

Mr. Bob was wise in his generation. He knew that the mention of the last name would secure him from any more chaff from his lady-love. She was silent for some time now, and the desultory chat of the breakfast-table went on around her.

"I had sad news of poor Miss Newsbury this morning," said the rector.

"What! has her tongue fallen off at last?" asked the eldest daughter, who aspired to caustic wit.

"No. But she's been speculating, poor thing, and lost a lot of money. I hear she is going to give up Grove Cottage and her house in town, and take a small house at Bath or Cheltenham—I forget which."

"I pity any town that she patronizes. She'll have them all by the ears in no time."

"You had a lot of letters this morning, James," put in Mrs. Manisty. "Was there any more news in them? I can't bring myself to care much about Miss Newsbury's misfortunes. Particularly since she tried to do all that harm between her nephew George and his dear little wife. I don't suppose *he'll* help her, at any rate. What else have you heard?"

"Mr. Hereward is to be made a peer."

"A peer!" This in general chorus of astonishment.

"Yes. He's been trying for some time, and at last he has succeeded. You see, he spent an enormous sum on that last election. But the premier, or the Queen, I don't know which, won't revive the Marquisate of Virginia in his favour."

"I should think not!" Ella could not help exclaiming.

"So he's to be Baron Hereward of Hereward's Heath, in the county of Dorset. He'll be an ornament to the Upper Chamber."

No one knew always whether the rector was in jest or earnest; and on this occasion they were at fault.

Then he rose.

"Oh, by the way," he said, pausing at the door, "I hear that the housekeeper at Braye has been told to put the carpets down, and get the house ready; so I suppose we may expect Harry down soon. I hope he may be persuaded to stop. It is bad for an estate when the owner stays away so long."

Two people at the table changed colour. One was Bob, and he coloured with impotent anger.

"Will you come for a stroll, Ella?" he asked, soon after.

"Not this morning, Bob. I want to be alone."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Don't you ever want to be alone?"

"Never. Unless I've got a toothache."

"Then imagine I have a toothache; that's a good boy."

"I'm not a boy, Ella—and ——"

"A good man, then." And she escaped.

Her favourite walk lately had been through the park of Castle Dorington, once her home, past the back of the old house that called up so many memories—some sweet, some sad—of the past; and on to the grey Norman church, to where, among many of the race of Bannerburn, her father slept under the gigantic yew-tree. Thither to-day she wended her way;

and, resting her forehead on the iron rail that surrounded the stone monument—"Sacred to the Memory of Thomas de Longueville Bannerburn, claiming to be eighteenth Baron Dorington of Castle Dorington," she stood long immersed in thought.

Coming home! She would see him again. See him whose image ever filled her mind; whose love had always filled her heart.

And yet—in all this time how many changes there might be! He had been in London; where he would meet all most likely to make him forget her. He had become a successful man. He had made a name in the House of Lords; he had, no doubt, been much flattered, much caressed; what was she but a poor country girl? How could she hope to have kept in his recollection.

And yet—though these doubts came and went—she never really doubted; and when, turning as she heard a step on the sward behind her, she looked into his face, and saw his honest eyes, it was scarcely a surprise: it seemed so natural that he should be there, just as her heart was calling for him.

"They said I might find you here," he said; "and I could not resist coming; even at the risk of interrupting your thoughts."

She took the hand he held out, for a moment, and then they turned and walked out of the churchyard, and into the park together.

"I met Bob outside the rectory," he said, after a pause.

"Oh, yes—he is home on leave. Don't you think he has improved very much?" Do what she would she could scarcely

command her voice, but the tone, to him, seemed calm enough.

"Very much. Yes. But when am I to—to congratulate you—George Newsbury told me—and——"

"*What* did he tell you?" asked Ella, stopping short.

"Only about you and Bob."

"Me and Bob! why, he's like a brother. You could not have believed that, Lord—Lord Hazelhatch."

"Am I not Harry still? Then there is no truth in it?"

"No."

It must have been his tone, rather than his words, that suddenly caused her to flush crimson, and to be incapable of another word.

He, too, said little, but, as he bent over to her, his arm encircled her waist, and, as his face approached to hers, as he strove

to see under the fallen lids of her eyes, words which sounded like "my darling" came from his lips.

Then, all at once, she looked up into his eyes, and her face grew radiant as that of an angel, beaming with her extreme happiness. Was it unmaidenly? Her arms went around his neck, her lips towards his—

"At last! At last!"

EPILOGUE.

IN THREE SCENES.

SCENE 1.—*A supper party in a charming bijou residence in St. John's Wood. A merry supper party, in which the noise is not all caused by the male element.*

"Lottie," says a young man, in the intervals of drinking an enormous glass of champagne. "This is incorrect. Where is our noble host?"

"He's coming," says the lady, with supreme unconcern. "And, as long as he pays, I don't much care whether he comes or not."

"Oh, the ingratitude of women!" says the young man, with mock gravity.

"Oh, bother!" cries the young lady he has called Lottie.

"Let's have a bear-fight."

Our modest pen will not describe the scene of confusion that ensued. In the midst of it enters a sallow gentleman, beautifully arrayed, and looking a little out of temper. "Oh, Gran!" cries Miss Lottie, catching sight of him, and desisting in her laudable efforts to pour a glass of wine down her neighbour's back. "Here you are, at last! Why the deuce do you stick so long in that beastly house? Did I tell you I had asked 'em all to supper from the theatre?"

"You certainly did not," replies the noble host, his brow still dark.

"Well—don't scowl—here they are."

"Most noble Lord of Hereward's Heath,

prospective Marquis of Virginia, future Duke of Jericho, and Prince of Jerusalem, I drink your health," cries a buxom lady with a high colour.

The giver of the feast, *malgré lui*, makes the best of it, drops into a chair, and drinks off a glass of Champagne.

* * * * * *

SCENE 2.—*A large house in Park Lane. Sitting up in her room, a little lame, ill-favoured lady, surrounded by evidence of wealth and luxury, but not of taste, and looking as wretched and sleepy as a lady well could look.*

"Will he never come?" she mutters. "It is the same always now. It isn't the House, I know, for the debate was to be a short one. He doesn't care for me—he hates me!" And the poor little lady, looking whiter than even she really is, as the

morning light steals in at the window, and plays on her thin cheeks—the great heiress, whose entertainments are the wonder—while her infatuation for her amusement-loving husband is the joke—of London, puts her head down on the end of the sofa, and weeps bitterly.

* * * * * *

SCENE 3.—"Yonder he goes!" cries Jack Stubbs, wild with excitement, digging his spurs frantically into his tired horse. "Yonder he goes!"

"Forard! Forard!" screams the master, now Lord Lorton, valiantly charging a stake-and-bound fence, and coming over with a scramble very like a fall.

The gallant fox presses onward; but a few miles intervene between him and that comfortable earth he knows so well, hidden in the deepest recesses of Eggleby Gorse; but those yelping monsters that have pur-

sued him for so many weary miles are pitilessly coming nearer. He doubles; he runs up and down a hedge-row.

"This way, confound it, Jack, cast this way," cries Harry, in a fury of excitement.

"Leave 'em alone, my lord," responds Jack, as cool as a cucumber, "leave 'em alone. There, Valorous has it, hark to Valorous. Forard! There he goes!"

Away again, away at as nearly racing pace as they can get out of their tired steeds. The hounds break from scent to view; for three minutes they race after him, with their heads up—then gobble-gobble-gobble—there is a confusion of hounds tumbling over one another. Jack jumps off his horse, and disperses them with a few cuts of his whip, and, holding up the mangled body, sends into the sky a "who-hoop" which might almost have been

heard at Foxborough, and *is* heard by many a disgusted sportsman for whom the pace has been too good, and who is plodding painfully on behind, in hopes of a check.

"The best run I ever saw," cries Harry, loosening his girth. "Hullo, George, here you are!"

"Got a cropper at that bottom," says the ex-master, coming up; he has grown stouter than when we last saw him, but otherwise looks in good case. "My eye, what a gallop!"

Then others come up, with various excuses for their tardiness, and they go over the run as they jog slowly homewards.

"Good night," shouts Harry, as his road diverges from the others; and he rides on alone, with pleasant thoughts for his companions, pleasant reminiscences of the sport he has had, pleasant anticipations of the home he is approaching.

Braye House is reached at last; he rides on to the stable-yard, and, scarcely pausing to tell the old groom about the run, he dashes into the house and upstairs. A quick ear has caught his footsteps in the passage, and the door of the drawing-room is opened for him.

"I was getting quite nervous, Harry, I declare; I really must take to hunting again directly I can. I always imagine you will break your neck, unless I am out to take care of you."

She puts one arm fondly round his neck as she speaks, and he kisses her.

"You little fool, Ella! It is only the men who funk who get killed. Are the chicks in bed?"

"Yes; but not asleep yet, I should say. Let us go upstairs."

They proceed to the nursery, and look into two little cots standing side by side,

in which lay a couple of children in that seraphic sleep which is one of the prettiest attributes of childhood.

As Ella and Harry look at them, insensibly her hand seeks his; they turn to each other, and he clasps her to his heart.

"Are you happy, darling?" he asks.

"Happy! Oh, Harry, life is too beautiful—and too short!"

THE END.

LONDON: PRINTED BY DUNCAN MACDONALD, BLENHEIM HOUSE.